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The Queen's carriage returns through Whitehall following yesterday's state opening of Parliament. Photograph: Brian Harris

About turn! Major rewrites the Queen's Speech in mid-debate

Anthony Davies
Political Editor

John Major yesterday performed one of the most dramatic and speedy U-turns of his administration when he agreed – in the middle of a Commons speech – that the Government would after all take charge of its own Bills on paedophiles and stalking.

The decision was taken during the opening stages of the debate on the Queen's Speech programme for the last, pre-election session of Parliament, a package stripped of all but the bare essentials.

After Tony Blair had repeated Labour's offer of full support for the two uncontested Bills, the Prime Minister held hurried consultations with Cabinet colleagues on the government front bench.

Then, replying to the Labour leader's attack on the Queen's Speech, Mr Major staggered

MPs in all parts of the House by accepting Mr Blair's offer to accept that deal.

For more than 24 hours, ministers had insisted that the creation of a paedophile register – promised by Michael Howard, Home Secretary, in a speech to this month's Conservative Party conference – and the long-awaited Bill on stalking, would have to be carried through the Commons by backbench MPs using the high-risk Private Member's Bill procedure.

But, having been ridiculed for an abdication of responsibility by some politicians and *The Independent*, the Prime Minister was clearly itching for an escape route, which he seized on when Mr Blair renewed his standing offer.

Mr Blair immediately intervened to say he was "delighted" by the remarkable concession. "It shows the country what we can achieve in opposition," he

said. Paddy Ashdown, Liberal Democrat leader, told the House that it was the "fastest U-turn in political history".

Certainly, it ranks as the most brazen and snappy U-turn of a Government responsible for the withdrawal of sterling from the European exchange rate mechanism, the dropping of EU non-cooperation over the beef ban, and the decision to stage a referendum on entry into a European single currency.

But that did not stop the Prime Minister's office and senior ministers denying any change of tack. Michael Forsyth, Secretary of State for Scotland, told BBC Radio: "I don't know how you can describe this as a U-turn. It is a U-turn on the part of the Opposition to say that they are not going to oppose Government measures concerned with crime."

Hoping for a hat trick, the

shadow Home Secretary, Jack Straw, said last night that Labour was also offering full support for legislation against sex tourism, another of Mr Howard's party conference promises jettisoned from the Queen's Speech.

Mr Major told the Commons that there had never been any question of putting the paedophile and stalking Bills in the Queen's Speech, though that was not the impression given to Tory representatives in Bournemouth.

As for the decision to use the Private Member's Bill procedure, that was being stoutly defended by senior ministers at lunchtime yesterday, with Stephen Dorrell, Secretary of State for Health, telling BBC Radio: "It is an absurd proposition to say that we should not use the uncontroversial Bills procedure designed for private members – not to use that to put through uncontroversial Bills."

But the point made all along by Labour and the Liberal Democrats was that if the Bills were so uncontroversial, nothing could be quicker – and surer – than government legislation carried through in Government time.

Donald Dewar, Labour chief whip, said last night: "It is clear that the Prime Minister changed his mind literally mid-speech, forced to give ground and seeing an opportunity for scuttling. It shows a good deal of confusion at the heart of Government."

Mr Major, however, drew

the line on a further retreat, standing firm against Mr Blair's call for a free-run vote on calls for a total ban on all handguns.

Given the decision by the Liberal Democrats to support a total ban, and with some Tories ready to rebel on the issue, the Government faces the real risk of defeat, unless it performs yet another U-turn, closer to the vote.

With the Government facing an election deadline of next May, the Queen's Speech, which identified 13 Bills for action on key political battlegrounds such as education, health and law and order, was

one of the shortest for years. While Mr Major cautiously made no mention of Europe in his speech to the House, he did go out of his way to stake out the ground on the Ulster peace process, with a tough warning to Sinn Féin and the IRA.

He warned that Sinn Féin could only join all-party talks if "real commitment" was shown to the peace process.

"So even if a new ceasefire is declared," he told the House, "there will have to be more than soft words to convince the Government... that it does not represent another tactical device to be abandoned at any convenient moment."

The stalking Bill

Stalkers could face up to five years in jail and an unlimited fine by next year under the "deal" accepted by John Major yesterday.

Anyone using words or behaviour on more than one occasion – twice would be enough – which puts their victim in fear of violence will be at risk of the penalty. A lesser offence, designed to catch words or behaviour causing harassment, alarm or distress, would carry up to six months' imprisonment and/or a £5,000 fine.

In a significant improvement on current criminal law, victims will not have to prove actual intent, and the range of new laws is designed to cover a range of activities from unwanted gifts and telephone calls to physical threats. Courts would also have the power to make a restraining order immediately after convicting a stalker of either of the two criminal offences. Breach of either of these civil orders would be a criminal offence.

The sex offenders Bill

The promised Government measure to clamp down on paedophiles and other sex offenders may be one of the quickest political climbdowns in recent political history, but the Bill that is now set to emerge is likely to be limited.

The measure would create a national register of convicted paedophiles and other sexual offenders. But most of the other proposals in a June White Paper have been put on ice. The suggestion that sex offenders be subject to extended supervision on release from prison forms part of the Crime (Sentencing) Bill, but three further proposals are on the back-burner. These were that it should be a criminal offence for convicted sex offenders to seek work involving children, that DNA testing be extended to include 3,500 sex offenders convicted prior to new powers in the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act came into force, and supervision of defendants' access to victim statements and photographs.

QUICKLY

Death of a soccer fan
Matthew Harding, Chelsea FC's multi-millionaire vice-chairman, who died in a helicopter crash on Tuesday, saw life in black and white. He adored football – investing £5m in Chelsea in 1994 – but had a feud with Ken Bates, the club's chairman. He went to public school, yet mixed happily with the fans, drinking at the same pub on the King's Road in London on matchdays. He was a City fly-by-night, but a supporter of Labour – a much-loved man of contradictions. **Page 3**

Scientists discover new human link with BSE

Liz Hunt
Health Editor

British scientists today publish the strongest evidence so far that "mad cow" disease has been transmitted to humans through infected beef.

EU officials last night warned that the new findings ruled out even a partial lifting of the beef export ban in the foreseeable future and said that Britain must honour its obligation to slaughter all high-risk cattle.

Scientists from the Imperial College School of Medicine at St Mary's Hospital, London, have shown that a protein associated with the new variant of Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (nvCJD) identified in humans earlier this year and tentatively linked with eating infected beef, closely resembles that seen in cattle with Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), and in other animals infected with BSE. The protein,

known as a prion, is quite distinct from that found in other forms of CJD. The research could lead to a new test to confirm the new variant of CJD.

These new findings are the first experimental evidence that the appearance of this fatal brain disease in humans is linked with the BSE epidemic in cattle. Twelve cases of the new CJD have been confirmed so far since March with two more suspected cases under investigation.

Professor John Collinge, a consultant neurologist who led the research, said yesterday: "The Government has been working on the assumption that BSE is a human pathogen [infectious agent] and this work strengthens that hypothesis."

A Department of Health spokeswoman called the findings "persuasive" but not conclusive.

Professor Collinge and his team analysed the biochemical properties of prion proteins associated with sporadic and acquired forms of CJD, new variant CJD, and BSE transmitted to mice, cats, and macaques.

According to their report in today's issue of *Nature*, they discovered a characteristic molecular signature in new variant CJD which was also present in

Birt-style shake-up for BT

Chris Godsmark
Business Correspondent

BT is to undertake one of the most radical internal shake-ups in its history, with plans to separate its business into as many as 50 trading units, using unpopular reforms implemented by John Birt at the BBC as one of its templates.

Unions fear the internal market programme, which is intended – 12 years after privatisation – to sweep away the last traces of civil service culture, could lead to whole chunks of the company's operations being hived off if they fail to meet exacting performance targets.

Departments responsible for payphones and multimedia services like the Internet already have to buy and sell functions from the rest of BT as if they were totally separate companies. A spokesman said, however, that the changes would be evolutionary rather than revolutionary. "This won't be big bang."

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Not, we might add, from the Food Hall.

Harrods, Knightsbridge SW1X 7XL. Telephone 0171-730 1234.

*Watch shown available in 18ct. yellow gold priced £10,450, white gold £12,140 and platinum £17,890.

news

significant shorts

Americans get access to UK tax records

The Government has gone back on promises never to send confidential tax records abroad because of fears that a £200m self-assessment computer system will crash. Labour is demanding assurances that taxpayers' private information will be safeguarded, but ministers have already decided that the privatised system will be accessed by telephone from sites in America and Australia.

The disclosure is made in today's issue of *Computer Weekly*. It has been passed a copy of a secret Inland Revenue memo to an unnamed minister, thought to have been Michael Jack, Financial Secretary to the Treasury, advising him that sending information abroad represents a fundamental change in the Inland Revenue's security policy and procedures.

It asks for permission to revise its security policy and its contract with the main contractor, the American information technology company EDS, and suggests planning a Parliamentary question that would allow the changes to be announced.

Last week, a question was asked of Mr Jack who said EDS would have 24 hour support from its database subcontractor, the American firm Oracle. He added that this would "necessitate specialist staff either in the UK, or exceptionally, at Oracle facilities abroad, having access to copies of batches of taxpayers' records".

Steve Baggan

More employees killed at work

The number of fatal injuries to workers excluding the self-employed is expected to rise slightly for the first time since the beginning of the decade, the Health and Safety Commission said in its annual report. However, the total number of fatal injuries in the year to March, including the self-employed, is expected to be the same as the previous 12 months at 272.

Clare Garner

Pets girl jailed

A former pet-shop assistant who left a rabbit and five gerbils to starve to death was jailed for two weeks by Nottingham magistrates. Christine Bescoy, 23, was also banned from keeping animals for 10 years. Bescoy, who worked in West Bridgford, Nottinghamshire, admitted cruelty.

Mother begs IRA to spare her son's life

A Belfast woman has made a desperate plea to the IRA to lift a death sentence on her son.

Jean Kennedy appealed to Direct Action Against Drugs, widely believed to be a cover for the Provisional IRA. A sentence was imposed on her son Paul, 21, a week ago after allegations of drug dealing.

She found out about the death sentence a week ago when graffiti was painted on walls near her home accusing her son of being a drug dealer. "I had no other choice other than to speak out, they've threatened my child's life," she said. "Once your name goes up on the walls that's it. I had to go public to let people know that my son's not a drug dealer."

Nancy Grecey, of the campaigning group Outcry, said: "It's taken a brave woman to do what she is doing. She is a very frightened lady."

A 17-year-old youth was in hospital in Belfast after being beaten by a gang armed with nail-studded clubs in what was apparently a paramilitary attack.

The prosecution claimed the company later produced "bogus and fabricated" documents to try to prove that regular checks had been made on food in the cabinet. Kwik Save pleaded guilty.

Supermarket sold old pies

The supermarket company Kwik Save was ordered to pay more than £7,000 in fines and costs for selling meat pies, quiches and pasta that were past their sell-by date at one of its stores.

An assistant manager at the shop in Coleford, Gloucestershire, tried to hide some of the out-of-date sausage and onion pies as trading standards officers checked the fresh food fridge, the town's magistrates were told.

The prosecution claimed the company later produced "bogus and fabricated" documents to try to prove that regular checks had been made on food in the cabinet. Kwik Save pleaded guilty.

The judge told Scammell and Mills, 38, it was the "gravest case of its kind he had ever come across. "No one will ever know the truth about the way in which you brutalised that little boy. It was a merciful release when he died because you know what you would have thought of next."

Asking if social services were conducting an inquiry, he added: "I would like to know whether an unoccupied house, cold without heating, full of beer bottles... is a suitable home for a child to be placed."

The court was told Ryan's body was discovered at Mills's home on 18 February. Nicholas Haggan, prosecuting, said Ryan's mother had been in a relationship with Scammell in 1993, but they had split up before his birth. She was unable to cope with the child and Ryan was placed in care. "So it came about that social services of Hampshire County Council made arrangements for the child to be placed with his father, who lived in the area."

Scammell arranged for Mills to look after Ryan at her home. A spokesman for Hampshire Social Services said an independent review carried out at the request of Hampshire County Council Social Services "found no single agency or individual was to blame" but "identified a series of shortcomings in... communications and procedures". She said the recommendations of an internal review were being considered.

Underlining the NFU council's extraordinary vote of no confidence in Mr Hogg, he warned: "Let him be in no doubt where he stands with the farming community - at rock bottom."

Shephard to act on crisis pupils

Fran Abrams
Education Correspondent

Government inspectors will be asked to draw up an emergency report on the troubled Halifax school where staff say 60 pupils are out of control, the education secretary Gillian Shephard is expected to announce today.

Mrs Shephard is due to make a statement on the school accompanied by senior officials from the schools inspection body, Ofsted. A team of Her Majesty's inspectors could be in the school as early as next week, preparing a full report on

an apparent breakdown of discipline there.

Calderdale Council has already sent a report on the school to ministers, but last night its chairman of governors said he had been given no indication that an announcement on its future was about to be made. He said he feared that the governing body might be suspended.

The school, which was opened less than two years ago after a merger, had been facing increasing discipline problems since the beginning of this year. In March, 13 year-old Sarah

Taylor was excluded for pushing a teacher who tried to stop her from fighting with her boyfriend. Her parents appealed against the decision and won, but were forced to withdraw the girl after staff threatened to strike if she returned.

Last week a further crisis blew up after teachers complained of no fewer than three serious assaults by pupils. Talks between unions and governors brought no solution, and the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers is now balloting on strike action.

Staff say that up to one in every 10 of their 600 pupils is "unteachable" and that some drastic action should be taken. They believe that if more children had been excluded from the school at an earlier stage the problem might have been contained.

The head, Karen Stansfield, has resigned along with one of her two deputies, complaining of disappointment and exhaustion. They are expected to leave at the end of term.

The local authority, school governors and unions have continued to negotiate, and yesterday the governors said a number of measures were being proposed to alleviate the situation. The council has promised extra resources and more support for the school.

Last night the chairman of governors, the Rev Stan Brown, said he would be disappointed if the press were informed about the decision before staff at the school had been told. "We have been working with the local authority to put together a package of measures. Whether Mrs Shephard has taken into account what is being suggested before making a judgement I

would be interested to know. "It may well mean that the present governing body is suspended," he said.

Brian Garvey, regional executive member of the NASUWT, said staff at the school would welcome any help they were offered.

"We don't want people going in to see what's happening. We have told them what's happening. We want people to come in and tell us what to do. If Gillian Shephard wanted to roll up her sleeves and sort things out the staff would cheer her through the door," he said.

After 217 days of 'sheer hell', 2,000 lobby Parliament to say they've had enough



Rural rage: Farmers protest at Central Hall

Photograph: Peter MacDiarmid

Angry farmers come to Westminster

Stephen Goodwin

Cautioned by their leaders to "do nothing silly", more than 2,000 farmers yesterday ringed the Palace of Westminster in one of the biggest mass lobbies of recent times.

From the Welsh hills, the Cheshire plain and backwaters such as Burgh-le-Marsh in Lincolnshire, they took a rare day off from the farm to demonstrate their anger at the Government's handling of BSE.

David Redgate of Coney Grey Farm, Brinsley in Nottinghamshire was typical. After losing thousands of pounds on beef bulls sold at auction he had come to London to demand a change of policy and the resignation of Douglas Hogg, the Minister of Agriculture.

"Maybe it is a token gesture, but after what farmers have been through I felt we had to come and complain," he said. Glancing across the stocky men

with weathered faces who filled Westminster Central Hall, he added that it looked as if most families had "sent Dad to make the protest while the sons stay at home to do the work".

There was a groan from the hall when Sir David Naish, president of the National Farmers' Union, alerted farmers to the disclosure of new evidence

linking the new strain of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in humans to BSE in beef.

Farmers had been through "217 days of sheer hell" since 20 March, when ministers first announced the probable link, he said. Sir David, who later delivered prime beef to 10 Downing Street, called for more support for the beef industry

and hill farmers - hit hard in this autumn's cattle sales - and for a speedier cull of older cattle.

Mr Hogg has promised the slaughter of cattle over 30 months old will be stepped up to 50,000 a week. Officials expect to hit this target next week but it will take until March to clear the backlog of condemned animals.

Sir David said he was angry that some traders and dealers had exploited the plight of those caught up in the mismanagement of the scheme. An NFU member from the north-east said renderers and slaughterhouses were holding farmers to ransom. "Spivs, auctioneers and dealers are taking us to the cleaners".

But the message that the farmers most wanted to get home was the imperative of re-opening export markets for their beef. Repeated signals by Mr Hogg that there would be no selective cull of cattle was seen in the rest of Europe as breaking the Florence Agreement on a phased lifting of the export ban, Sir David said.

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his family for over 400 years. Since March when the BSE scare began he estimates he has lost £3,000 to £4,000 and there is no end in sight. Mr Oldfield only has the capacity to home 100 cows. He has 114 and doesn't know when the extra will be able to be slaughtered.

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Chelsea in mourning as vice-chairman's helicopter crashes on way home from match



Young Chelsea supporters at Stamford Bridge yesterday to mourn the man who was regarded as the club's saviour Photograph: PA

Death of a £750m football fan

Michael Streeter

Eight-year-old Jody Craig was in tears as she left her flowers at the entrance to Chelsea Football Club's stadium. "I had just got his autograph," she sobbed, as she stood wearing her team's yellow away strip with her father. "I am so upset." Her distraught father Stewart added: "We have come to pay our last respects. He did so much for this club."

Their mood echoed that of the many fans who turned up at the Stamford Bridge ground in Fulham, west London, yesterday, as news of vice-chairman and multi-millionaire insurance businessman Mr Harding's death in a helicopter crash filtered through. The accident killed four others on the aircraft, including the pilot.

The fans included the chairman of rival Premier League team Wimbledon FC, Sam Hamman, a close friend, who added his own floral tribute to the dozens at the gates. It was signed: "You were full of life, goodbye my friend, Sam."

Tributes came in too from senior politicians, including fellow Chelsea fan John Major, who spoke of the "huge amount" Mr Harding had done for the club, and from Tony Blair - whose party received a £1m donation from Mr Harding.

By coincidence, the helicopter involved in the crash had been used to ferry Mr Blair from the party's recent conference in Blackpool. But the sentiment that summed up the emotions of the fans, who saw him as one of their own, came on one floral tribute: "To Matthew Harding, a friend of the ordinary fan, God bless," it read.

Yesterday, the Chelsea chairman, Ken Bates, expressed his sorrow and announced that the new north stand would be named in memory of the vice-chairman.

A man of surprises in black, white and blue

Chris Blackhurst

There was no half-way house with Matthew Harding. If he liked you he would speak to you; if he did not he would not. That black and white view governed his approach to life, to making money, to football, to politics. During his feud with Ken Bates, the Chelsea chairman, he asked a friend to advise him on how best to end the row. The friend discovered that one thing none of Harding's advisers had ever done was to actually talk to Bates, so he did.

When Harding found out the friend quickly realised why none of the previous advisers had done the same. Harding belatedly asked him, "are you working for me or working for him?" Until Harding invested £5m in Chelsea Football Club in 1994, he was an unknown, a young guy who had made many millions from one of the more obscure aspects of City business, the convoluted reinsurance market. It seemed fitting that Chelsea, with its flashy, big talk reputation should be the club for a 43-year-old, cocky, multi-millionaire from the not so pokky side of the City. End of story.

Soon it became obvious to those who met him that this was wrong. He talked about his politics, not the traditional blinkered Toryism of the self-made man at the top of football but socialism. He was avowedly pro-Labour and pro-Tony Blair, feeling the party would drop its suspicion of business success and once in power, would promote education and training, something he felt strongly about.

He was at odds with the milieu in which he moved. How many other football bosses or City wheeler-dealers openly boasted of their willingness to pay taxes? His love for Chelsea had held firm through 30 years of strife, on and off the field. While other clubs' money-men wore camel coats, puffed on large cigars, drove flash cars and put a wall of glass between their executive boxes and the fans, Harding mixed it with the lads. He drank at the same pub in the King's Road on match days, held court with the supporters in train buffets on away journeys and once tried to take a four-pack into the directors' seats at Wembley. In London, he went everywhere by black cab.

He did not fit a pre-conceived pattern. He quoted Salinger in his company report and listened to Wagner, but loved books on Chelsea and liked to hum the anthem of the Shed, the end for die-hard fans. "One man went to mow..." Yet inevitably, there was a gulf between him and the Shed. A fortune estimated at between £150m to £200m and a public school education saw to that.

After leaving school with one A Level in Latin he went straight into the City, as a trainee with Benfield, a reinsurance broker. In 1988, he led a management buy-out, borrowing £160,000 for a one-third share in the company. Harding and his team based their deal on the firm making £4m a year for 10 years, at the end of which they would have paid-off the original shareholders. As it was, thanks to Harding's flair, the shareholders were paid-off in three years. Last year, Benfield made profits of £32m on sales of £50m.



Minding it: Harding was a complex man Photograph: PA

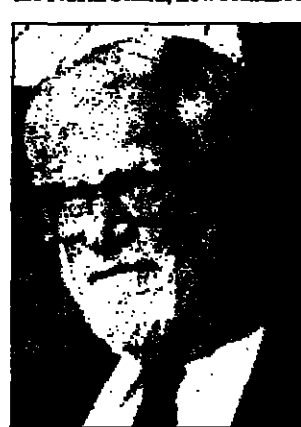
Loss will not affect club's plans

Glenn Moore

Football Correspondent

The supporters who gathered at Stamford Bridge yesterday were mourning more than an uncommonly beloved football vice-chairman. They were also attempting to come to terms with the possible loss of Chelsea's bright new future.

Chelsea's board met in emergency session yesterday as the club tried to assess the full implications of Matthew Harding's death. After the meeting, Ken Bates, the club's chairman, insisted the tragedy "does not and will not" affect his plans for the future of the club. Mr Harding had injected £26.5m into Chelsea, and Mr Bates said he had put "the promised financial commitments in place".



Ken Bates: The financial commitments are in place

Mr Bates said: "This will allow us to move on to the next phase in achieving his and every Chelsea fan's dream of having a world-class team and a world-class stadium. The board feels his memory will be best served by achieving those objectives."

Since Mr Harding became involved with the west London club, it has moved from the ranks of also-rans towards the game's elite. World-famous names, such as Rudi Gullit, have been attracted to the team, while the stadium began a long-overdue regeneration.

This was almost entirely due to the unlikely combination of Mr Harding and Mr Bates. It was Mr Bates, a 64-year-old entrepreneur who placed the advertisement in the Financial Times appealing for investors which Mr Harding answered three years ago.

It was a stormy marriage. Mr Bates, chairman since 1981, may have saved the club from liquidation, but Mr Harding - an effervescent, lifelong supporter - soon supplanted him in the affections of many fans. The honeymoon period was followed by an acrimonious separation during which both parties made full use of the tabloid press. Harsh words were exchanged, but earlier this year the pair kissed and made up.

west staff correspondent of *The Times*, was involved in a crash with another car near the scene of the helicopter tragedy in Cheshire.

Police said she died in Leighton Hospital, Crewe, 90 minutes after the accident. The driver of the other car involved, from Sandbach, Cheshire, was being treated at the same hospital with head injuries.

James MacManus, managing editor of *The Times*, said Ms Alderson, from Co Durham, had been on the paper for four years. "She graduated from Manchester University and knew the area well. She had a glittering career in front of her, she was very popular with everyone here, and we are all in shock."

A spokeswoman for Cheshire police said the accident happened on the A530 near Northwich at 10am.

after Mr Harding, is repayable in 2008. Mr Harding was a shrewd financier and he was devoted to Chelsea, but even if there is provision for the club in his will, it is unlikely to match the amount he might have invested had he lived.

Mr Bates may reflect with a bitter irony upon a comment he made last year in defence of his plans to turn Stamford Bridge into a multi-function development: "I believe you cannot rely on one man's affluence, the club has to be run as a business," he said.

They had their differences but, yesterday, Mr Bates' presence gave him no pleasure at all.



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news

Should the state pay £3/4m for this?

Yes: Regions need good modern art

Marianne Macdonald
Arts Correspondent

Does a small gallery in the Lake District have the right to a large lottery grant to buy a painting by a "modern Old Master" such as Lucian Freud? That was the question the art world was asking yesterday as the Abbot Hall Art Gallery fought to raise the money to buy *Portrait on Grey Cover*, a powerful oil of a woman lying on a bed, by the Berlin-born artist. Yesterday it had raised only one-third of its £750,000 price, but with the original deadline for payment of midnight last night extended at the last minute to Monday night, there seemed to be a glimmer of hope. But that will depend on whether the lottery distribution bodies can be persuaded to change their rules on the purchase of modern art in what has clearly emerged as an exceptional case. *Portrait on Grey Cover* is presently on show in an selling exhibition at the New York gallery owned by Freud's dealer, Bill Acquavella, who has at least two other collectors ready to snap it up. The oil had previously been included, hot off the canvas, in the Kendal gallery's summer retrospective of Freud, which had 26,000 visitors. But when it applied to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a grant towards the purchase price, the gallery, an independent charitable trust, was told it could not qualify because the painting was less than 20 years old. The HLF sent it to the Arts Council's lottery fund. But it turned out that the Arts Council could only give grants for new commissions. The Freud painting, although just completed, fell between the two stools.

The HLF protested yesterday that its trustees had felt obliged to set the 20-year rule to prevent the purchase of artworks which had not been validated by the test of time. But Edward King, director of Abbot Hall, which also owns a major Ben Nicholson painting and an impressive collection of George Romney paintings, was furious. "The 20-year figure seems completely arbitrary. They should look at each grant on its own merit," he said. "Everyone acknowledges Freud is a leading painter of today. It's terribly important that regional galleries and museums are able to build up their collections if they are to attract visitors." Ironically, it was a 1943 painting by the reclusive grandson of Sigmund Freud which attracted the first export stop put on a work by a living artist two years ago, when its owner applied to take it out of Britain. The Tate and Chatsworth House used the delay to raise the £515,812 asking price for *The Painter's Room*, which depicts a zebra's head, palm and shabby sofa. But the owner decided not to sell. It is now in a bank vault. That controversy raised the question of whether Freud's work would be less likely to find buyers if penalised by regulations which can prevent the export of artworks over 50 years old considered vital to the nation. Now, it appears, Freud is the victim of more bureaucracy, with lottery funding forbidden from going to an artist considered by many to be one of the greatest alive, for fear his work will not stand the test of time — even though it has done so for the last half-century.



Portrait on Grey Cover by Lucian Freud and (below) Edward King, director of Abbot Hall Art Gallery



No: private patrons ought to fork out

David Lister

Art is the name of an excellent new play in London's West End. Its real star is an enormous all-white canvas, supposedly white lines on a white background, though of course these are impossible to see. The arguments that ensue over the intrinsic worth or otherwise of this (highly expensive) painting are among the sort of arguments the Heritage Lottery Fund wants to avoid in its 20-year rule. Much that is acclaimed but controversial, much that is rubbish but acclaimed is admittedly more than 20 years old. But at least a couple of decades should see a weeding out of most of the fashion-chasing media darling artists, the hyped pictures and faddish movements.

A 20-year rule, argued the fund trustees under Lord Rothschild when the lottery rules were being drawn up, was a reasonable time in which to assess the artist's significance and the significance of the work itself. Lord Rothschild said last night: "It seemed a reasonable period of time to get a balance and focus about what would become heritage. We were even nervous about as small a period as 20 years. Certainly it should also apply to great painters of the day. Painters can change a great deal in their lifetimes, and later work is not always consistent with their great years, though as it happens Lucian Freud is at the height of his powers as a painter. A period of reflection can only be helpful."

Much has been made in the last few years about trends in "video art" and in the New York contemporary art scene. But Robert Hughes, the notable art critic whose retrospective series *American Visions* is about to be shown on BBC television, told me: "I don't now think there is any video art of lasting worth and American art at present is in the doldrums." In the visual arts perhaps more than any other art form reputations can rise and fall in a remarkably short time. In comparison 20 years is an age. In addition, private benefactors such as the advertising mogul Maurice Saatchi have in the past stepped in to buy works by leading names, though these names are often of a more avant-garde persuasion than

the figurative painter Lucian Freud.

There is indeed a continuing danger that we will lose works of art to America, and it is no coincidence that Lucian Freud's dealer is now Acquavella of New York.

But if one of these quangoes needs to change its rules it is the Arts Council, which should be allowed to use lottery money to gamble on contemporary art, and not the Heritage Lottery Fund. Freud may be part of our artistic heritage, but that does not mean that his newest works are necessarily among his best. If heritage is to have any meaning it must be that a created work cannot be considered part of the cultural heritage until it has achieved either critical or public acclaim over a long period, transcending fads and fashions.

Even David Barrie, the campaigning director of the National Art Collections Fund, which has given £75,000



The artist Lucian Freud

towards keeping the Freud painting in the country, and is frustrated with the confusion over lottery funding by Heritage and Arts Council funding bodies, is prepared to defend the 20-year rule.

"Contemporary art is a very tricky area," he says. "It often takes a little time to establish whether a work of art is going to establish heritage status. That's particularly true with avant-garde work. Damien Hirst for example. But Freud is a living classic. One knows his work will be part of the heritage very soon. What we need is for the Heritage Lottery Fund to have a 20-year rule but have the courage to make exceptions to it for contemporary works of outstanding quality."

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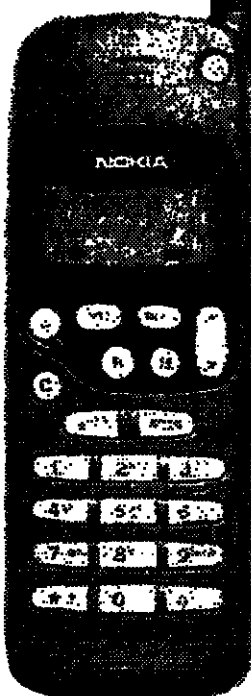
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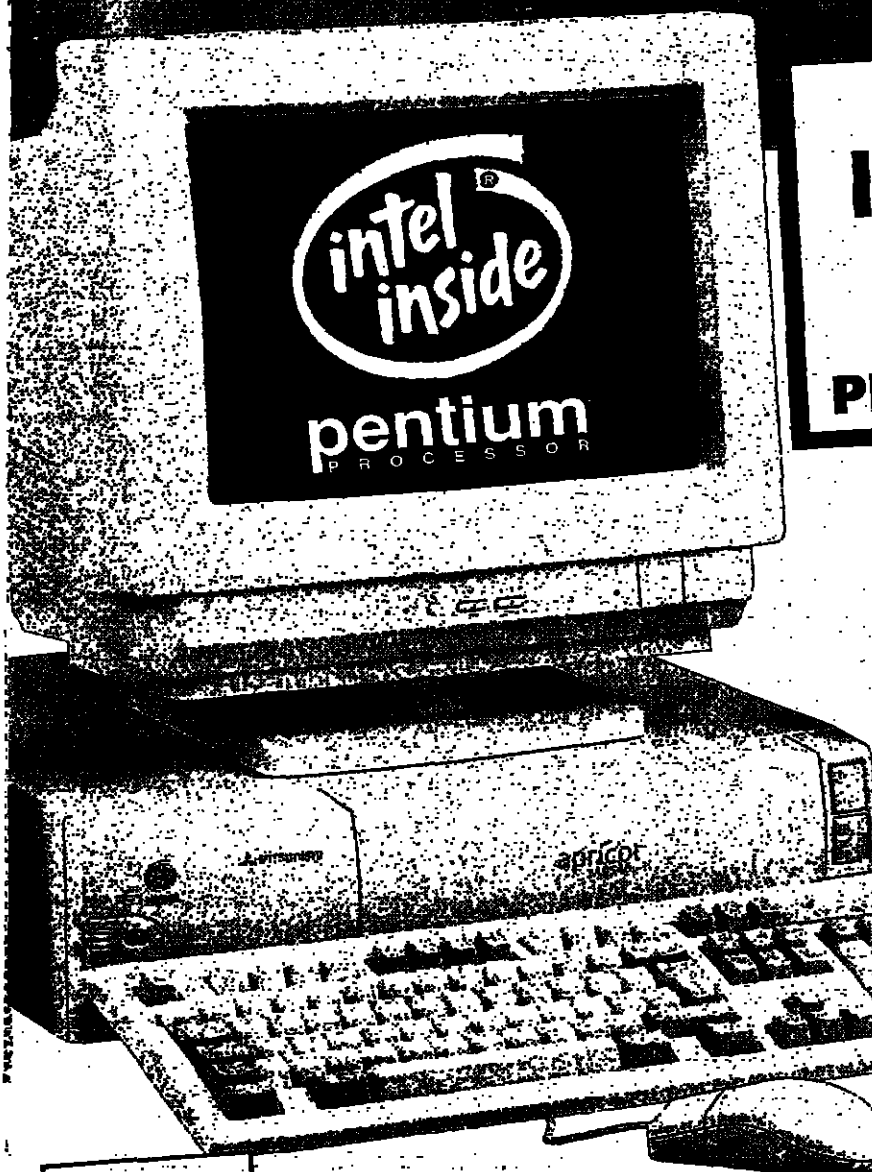
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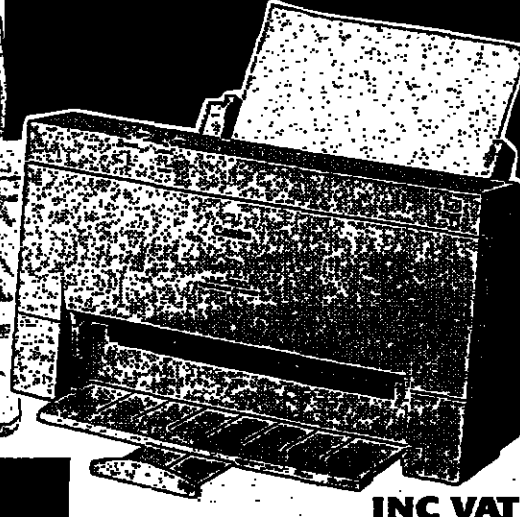
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news

THE QUEEN'S SPEECH



The Primary Care Bill

What it does

Wider choice for patients, better targeted services and greater freedom and flexibility for doctors, dentists, and pharmacists. The prospect of big retailers such as Asda and Sainsbury providing "branded" primary care for the NHS has been raised but dismissed by the Department of Health as "unlikely though not impossible". Ministers prefer to emphasise the development of super-surgeries and cottage hospitals offering a wide range of care and access and the professions agree - as long as there is new money for them.

Political punch

Labour's warnings that the Bill's proposals "tear at the very roots of the public-service ethos of general practice" are somewhat diluted by the enthusiastic reception given to the White Paper by doctors, dentists, pharmacists and managers.

Real importance

A considered and consensual approach to the development of primary care in response to ever greater demand.

The Social Security Fraud Bill

What it does

Will enable cross-checks to be made of Inland Revenue, benefit claims and VAT returns, opening data for the first time to disclosure to social security officers. Also sets up a new inspectorate to monitor anti-fraud work in housing and council tax benefits by local authorities, with powers to force councils to tighten up.

Political punch

Attempts to put Labour on the spot over welfare fraud but Labour say it misses the point: private landlords are getting away with housing benefit fraud running to £2bn through organised crime.

Real importance

May catch more small fry but big fish likely to go free. Also raises long-term civil rights issue over disclosure of data.

The Education Bill

What it does

Plans to increase school selection where parents want it, give more freedom to grant-maintained schools, tighten rules on school discipline and raise standards through testing for five year-olds and target-setting for all schools.

Political punch

Highlights Labour embarrassment over selection and opting out. Harriet Harman sent her son to a grammar school and Tony Blair sent his to a grant-maintained school.

Real importance

None, in the case of selection, because parents do not usually want it. Extra testing and target-setting will give better measures of how well schools are doing.

Legislation for the long-term -

Major fury at 'lectures' from Blair

John Rentoul
Political Correspondent

The Prime Minister responded furiously to Tony Blair's attack on his government for "fracturing" society, saying he was "not inclined to accept sanctimonious lectures" from the Labour leader.

Opening five days of Commons debate on yesterday's Queen's Speech, Mr Blair said: "If our society is torn and fractured as it is, I ask who in part fractured it?" Mr Blair pointed at the Government benches: "They did."

He went on: "All the fine words of ministers will not mend it. We will mend this fractured society when those that fractured it, those that said that there was no such thing as society are no longer governing our society."

John Major replied, in an exchange which could herald a bitterly hostile parliamentary session lasting until a May election next year: "I think any politician should be very cautious about cloaking himself in righteousness."

'We will mend this fractured society when those that fractured it are no longer governing

our society.' "I don't know how the Right Honourable Gentleman can disclaim responsibility for faults in society today when his own Labour Party has consistently championed every fashionable, politically correct cause that has undermined our traditional way of life and opposed every measure we have taken to redress the balance."

According to advisers, the Prime Minister was incensed by press coverage suggesting that proposals by Frances Lawrence, widow of the murdered headmaster Philip Lawrence, were part of a left-wing "moral crusade" led by the churches and the Labour Party.

It is understood Mr Major met Mrs Lawrence some weeks ago to discuss her views, and feels that Mr Blair has attempted to adopt her "manifesto" late in the day. Mr Major allowed his irritation to show when he said: "Let me remind you that it was Labour councils that banned competitive sports in schools, undermined traditional teaching approaches and sponsored every anti-establishment pressure group they could find."

And he responded to Labour heckling on the question of personal choice by launching a personal attack on Mr Blair. When a Labour MP shouted, "Tell that to the parents", Mr

THE DEBATE

Major replied: "Well, some parents have noted that [the widening of choice] for themselves. Some parents have moved their children from high-spending Islington." Mr Blair's son attends a grant-maintained school eight miles from his home in Islington.

Mr Major went on: "If there are problems in society, the Right Honourable Gentleman might look at poor-performing Labour authorities as one of the roots of those problems." This picked up the theme of Conservative barracking of Mr Blair on education, when Tory MPs shouted that it was Labour that ran education authorities up and down the country.

On the Government's record on crime, the health service, the economy and education, Mr Blair said: "It is as if they had just landed from Mars, as if they had been in exile for 17 years and had just discovered how shabby things are." He said cutting debt payments to 16- and 17-year-olds, homelessness and cuts in training places contributed to a fractured society.

But he provoked uproar on the Tory benches when he went on: "When that part of our society that can afford to take private health care, sends their children to private schools, shuns public transport - yes, because they cannot tolerate the waiting times, the mixed quality, the degeneration of public transport. Doesn't that contribute to the fracturing of our society?"

He attacked cuts in top income tax rates and rises in tax on fuel which caused old-age pensioners to pause before lighting the fire.

Mr Major accused the Opposition of making a "razed speech", contrasting Mr Blair's "sweeping generalisations" with his search for "practical solutions often to complex problems". He said: "To oversimplify is to deceive and not to engage with the real problems." He said Mr Blair had been "evasive and misleading about his policies."

But it was the Tory backbencher Marion Roe, MP for Broxbourne and chairman of the all-party health select committee, who succeeded in forcing Mr Blair on to the defensive. She intervened in his speech to ask if he would match the Prime Minister's promise to the Tory conference in Bournemouth this month to spend more on the NHS in real terms every year.

"Those commitments have been shown to be utterly worthless," Mr Blair responded. Proclaiming the record of the last Labour government, he said that, if the Tories want to "pit their commitment to the NHS against ours, let them call a general election and let the people



decide". Mrs Roe's intervention followed Mr Blair's recitation of his charges against the government's health policy. "Drift has never been more in evidence or more damaging than in the National Health Service," he said. But the Labour leader is believed to be having private

discussions with Gordon Brown, the shadow chancellor, about how to respond to Mr Major's pledge, which was identical to the pledge before the last election, which has been kept. Labour MPs say it is "inconceivable" they would not match the promise, but Mr Blair avoided

a direct answer. In his speech, Mr Major sought to play down expectations of tax cuts. He said the "meaty" Queen's Speech would be followed by a "prudent" Budget next month. "If we can safely cut taxes, we will. If we cannot, we will not," he said, but repeated:

"If we cannot, we will not."

Paddy Ashdown, leader of the Liberal Democrats, responded: "If the Chancellor does cut taxes this Autumn, he will be doing so for purely political purposes... If Labour cannot find the courage to oppose them, they are colluding in

that." Mr Ashdown added: "If ever a Queen's Speech revealed a government in its tormented, twilight days, it is this rag-bag of irrelevant measures. This is a speech driven more by what will wrong-foot the Opposition, than what is right for the country."

Measures to improve discipline in schools will include giving them the power to put pupils in detention without their parents' consent and forcing every school to draw up a policy on the subject.

There will be measures to deal with a growing crisis over exclusions. Those will include more flexibility for schools on the number of days for which they can temporarily remove a child and more rights for schools to be represented when parents appeal against exclusions.

Labour claims many of these measures as its own, along with plans for "base-line" testing of five-year-olds, for schools to set targets for improving standards and for wholesale Ofsted inspections of local authorities.

The Opposition will, however, attack plans to allow primary-age children to receive help with private school fees if their parents are on low incomes. Labour wants to abolish the Assisted Places Scheme for secondary schools and to use the money to reduce class sizes in state schools.

Others accused the Government of using the Bill to play politics in the run-up to the election. Its commitment to selection will separate it from the other main parties and highlight Labour's embarrassment over the decision of Harriet Harman, the party's social services spokeswoman, to send her son to a selective school.

Don Foster, the Liberal Democrat education spokesman, said the Bill was "all politics and no policy".

GP 'retailers' to offer their own brand of care

Liz Hunt
and Colin Brown

HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

The Primary Care Bill will consolidate the position of family doctors, dentists and pharmacists and the services they provide as the jewels in the crown of the National Health Service, health ministers have promised. Labour says the Bill will open the service to the horrors of commercialisation.

At its heart is a change in the way GPs are employed. It will provide opportunities for individuals or organisations, including private retailers or trust hospitals, to employ doctors and establish their own brand of primary-care practice, funded by the NHS.

Such "practice-based" con-

tracts would speed the growth of super-surgeries or cottage hospitals, in a move designed to ease the burden on acute hospitals, and their costs. The health centres of the 21st century would offer services ranging from minor surgery, screening, X-rays and physiotherapy to health education.

Patients would be able to consult a variety of health-care professionals who will assume a wider role in the primary-care service and greater responsibility for patients, leaving GPs to focus on the most serious and complex cases.

Under present laws, every GP is an independent contractor with the Secretary of State for

Health and must provide core services, which rules out "flexibility", the key to the forthcoming Bill.

Another significant development in primary care will be proposals for a single budget for general medical services, hospital and community health services and prescribing, which will, in effect, allow some fundholding GPs to become "mini-health authorities" with a legally binding contract to provide all services for their patients. This has been hailed by the National Association of Fundholding Doctors as the most exciting and radical idea in the forthcoming Bill.

Doctors are to be encouraged

to contract with health authorities to provide high street services for a specific population. The Bill will also include incentives for health authorities to buy a wider range of pharmacy services.

While the health-care professions have broadly welcomed the Government's proposals detailed in the White Paper, *Choice and Opportunity*, published last week, they are concerned about new money for the service. Labour's fears that the Bill is prelude to some privatisation is not a predominant concern.

Doctors in particular have applauded the cautious approach of Stephen Dorrell, Secretary of State for Health, who has said that every development will be

tested in voluntary pilot schemes and fully evaluated before any permanent, widespread change. The entrepreneurs among the professions could seize the initiative, he said. But the British Medical Association and the National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts have warned that without investment in primary care, the Government's plans would fail.

The Social Security Bill to tackle fraud being introduced by the secretary of state, Peter Lilley, was said by the Opposition spokeswoman Harriet Harman to have missed its £2bn target. She announced her own measures to outflank the Government.

The Bill will establish an

agency to put pressure on local authorities to curb housing benefit fraud and will give social security officials new powers to cross-check income tax and VAT returns with benefit claims.

Attacking the measure as "too little, too late", Ms Harman said the Government had been forced to act by the calls for action by Frank Field, Labour chairman of the cross-party Commons Select Committee on Social Security.

Mr Field and his committee warned that organised criminals were using Mafia-style intimidation, including murder, to carry out massive frauds on housing benefit, using "stolen" national insurance numbers and making multiple claims

for tenants who did not exist.

Ms Harman said the fraud was running at an estimated £2bn but it would go largely untouched by the measures announced by Mr Lilley at the Conservative Party conference. The Government was trying to "scapegoat" local authorities while failing to tackle the major problem, because it said it did not wish to add to the regulatory burdens on the private sector.

"Local authorities should have the power to refuse to pay direct to private landlords in all but exceptional circumstances," she said. "Local authorities should also provide details of payments to landlords direct to the Inland Revenue to ensure that they pay income tax."

John Major

THE QUEEN'S SPEECH

news

The Crime (Sentencing) Bill

What it does

Home Secretary Michael Howard's flagship law and order measure under which serious, dangerous and persistent offenders would be jailed more often and for longer periods, leaving little scope for judges to fit punishments to particular crimes.

Political punch:

Government has real hopes of putting Labour on the spot. Who, after all could oppose a life sentence for a man who has raped twice? So far, has only been the judges and penal reformers who have voiced strong opposition.

Real importance:

Unless made more flexible, could backfire because of fewer guilty pleas and wrongful acquittals, while prisons will face overcrowding and funding crisis.

The Firearms Amendment Bill

What it does:

Post-Dunblane ban on all higher-calibre handguns above .22, with less powerful weapons confined to gun clubs under stringent security. There would be tighter police licensing procedures and a clampdown on mail-order.

Political punch:

Could rebound badly on Tories if Labour and Lib Dems secure total ban in face of government attempt to dictate to its own backbenchers.

Real importance:

Cannot entirely remove the risk of future tragedies, as stabbing of headmaster Philip Lawrence shows, nor stop criminals using unlicensed weapons. But 80 per cent of legally-held weapons will be taken out of circulation.

The Police Bill

What it does

Would set up a national police unit to fight organised crime and a criminal records vetting agency to which employers and workers would have access. Would also put police bugging on a statutory basis.

Political punch

One of the few areas where there appears to be a measure of cross-party agreement, but trouble in prospect over the agency, particularly over giving access to information about police suspects.

Real importance:

There are question-marks over the civil liberties implications, but national crime squad widely thought to be right response to organised crime.



or campaigning for the spring?

Outlawing guns will be hard fight

Jason Bennetto
Crime Correspondent

GUNS

The proposal to outlaw 80 per cent of handguns will be one of the most fiercely fought Bills in the coming months after the Government refused yesterday to cave in to pressure for an all-out ban on pistols.

The Firearms Amendment Bill, which was the Government's response to the Dunblane massacre, would outlaw all handguns above .22 calibre, and confine the use of the remaining, less powerful pistols to gun clubs, which would be obliged to take the most stringent security precautions.

Support for the Bill is on a knife edge, with the Government virtually certain to impose a three line whip to bring dissident backbenchers outside. However Labour will put down amendments calling for a total ban for handguns and will campaign for a free vote on what they insist must be an issue of conscience.

The Liberal Democrats will support them, and with four Tory MPs, David Mellor, Hugh Dykes, Terry Dicks, and Robert Hughes, having indicated their support for an outright ban, it may be left up to the nine Ulster Unionist MPs to cast the deciding votes.

The Rev Martin Smyth, the chief whip of the Ulster Unionists, refused yesterday to be drawn on whether they would back the Government. While he said they were not convinced of the case for a total ban on handguns, he expressed concern that terrorists could start targeting gun clubs if weapons were stored on the premises.

The Government's Bill will result in the destruction of around 160,000 of the 200,000-odd handguns currently in circulation in England, Wales and Scotland.

There would also be tighter licensing procedures, stronger police powers to suspend or revoke certificates, a ban on dump ammunition, tighter mail order controls, and a requirement for all handgun users to have certificates, and to notify police when they dispose of their weapons. Some professions, such as vets, will be allowed to keep more powerful guns.

Parents and relatives of the 16 children and teacher who were killed in Dunblane will be fighting for an all-out ban, while the shooting lobby is equally determined to oppose it.

Tony Blair, responding to the Queen's Speech, said Labour welcomed what had been announced already on gun control.

But he added: "If we are banning 160,000 handguns, presently lawfully held, what is the case for leaving the remaining 40,000 at large?"

Mr Blair said that if .22 handguns could cause similar damage to that which was inflicted at Dunblane, then it followed that all handguns should be banned.

"Let the 80% solution become the 100% solution and Parliament will have done the will of the people."

John Major acknowledged differences in the Commons on the Government's proposals to reform the gun laws, but said there was an "overwhelming belief" that new legislation should be enacted as speedily as possible.

Michael Forsyth, Secretary of State for Scotland, added: "By any standards those people who wish to see handguns off our streets will wish to see this legislation on the statute book as quickly as possible."

"The way for that to happen is for Parliament to give it as free a ride as possible, and that depends on the Opposition. We will do our bit and whip it through the House."

Patricia Wynn Davies
and Jason Bennetto

Michael Howard has savagely scorned his "law and order" programme of a range of additional measures in a bid to force through his plans for longer prison terms for serious or persistent offenders.

The Home Secretary wants the Crime (Sentences) Bill, to be published tomorrow, to have cleared all its Commons and Lords' stages by February so it can receive Royal Assent by Easter. Key measures in the separate Police Bill are the creation of a new national crime squad and an agency to vet the criminal records of job applicants.

The Crime Bill will concentrate on the core issues of abol-



The Queen and the Prince of Wales making their way into the Palace of Westminster yesterday

Photograph: PA

Mandatory sentences top Howard's agenda

CRIME AND POLICE

ishing parole and automatic early release, and bringing in automatic indeterminate life sentences for second-time rapists or violent offenders and mandatory minimum sentences for three convicted domestic burglars and serious drug dealers.

There will also be stricter supervision of sex offenders on release, and new powers for courts to impose community service or curfew orders, backed by electronic tagging, instead of fines or as an alternative to prison for first defaulters.

A series of further possibilities that Mr Howard had publicly paraded - including banning under 18s from drinking in public places, "naming and shaming" juveniles in magistrates' courts, and a new sentence of deprivation of a driving licence - were all absent from yesterday's speech.

The sentencing crackdown has provoked bitter opposition from the judiciary and a full-scale cross-party rebellion in prospect when the measure reaches the Lords. Paul Cavadi-

no, chairman of the Penal Affairs Consortium said: "Mandatory sentences will do nothing to reduce crime but a great deal to produce serious injustice. Automatic sentences for serious violent and sexual offenders will lead to fewer guilty pleas, greater distress to victims who have to give evidence, more plea-bargaining and more wrongful acquittals of dangerous offenders."

This will reduce rather than increase public safety."

Penal campaigners have warned that the measures would see the record prison population of more than 57,000 soaring by at least another 10,000, at a cost of hundreds of millions of pounds.

The crunch issue, however, is the attitude of Labour in the Commons. The Government hopes to trap the party into a position of appearing "soft" on serious crime. A key issue will be how closely the Bill will seek to define the "exceptional circumstances" when the mandatory sentences would not apply.

North of the border, the Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Bill will omit the mandatory minimum sentence for

domestic burglars, though a seven-year minimum is proposed for traffickers in Class A drugs. The omission, Michael Forsyth, the Scottish Secretary said, was due to a downward trend in burglaries. In addition, some repeat burglars can be sent for trial at the Scottish High Court, where they are already at risk of a life sentence.

The National Crime Squad proposed in the Police Bill will have two wings. An operational one will be made up of the existing six regional crime squads who will support police forces in the investigation of serious crime. The intelligence-gathering role will be carried out by the National Criminal Intelligence Service.

New legislation will also allow police officers legally to break into homes, search them, copy documents, and plant listening devices and cameras.

The Bill also proposes the creation of a Criminal Records Agency for England and Wales. The agency would be able to charge private companies and individuals for checks on potential employees.

There would be three types of checks: a criminal conviction certificate which would contain information of current convictions; a "full" check for jobs such as teaching, lawyers, health-care, which would include details of cautions and spent convictions; and "enhanced" checks for those seeking work with children or in the gaming, betting and lottery business.

Laws for tougher controls on foreign-registered ships follow the wreck of the *Braer*, which caused one of the nation's biggest oil spills. The merchant shipping and maritime safety bill would allow the Government to charge shipowners for emergency pollution control work if a vessel began to spill its load, and also to charge for safety inspections of their vessels in British ports.

The legislation would also enable the Government to insist that owners of ships operating in British waters had third party insurance.

The Heritage Lottery Fund Bill, to be introduced by Virginia Bottomley, the National Heritage Secretary could be controversial because it will allow grants for stately homes where the owners allow access to the public.

The Merchant Shipping and Maritime Safety Bill

The Heritage Lottery Fund Bill

The National Criminal Intelligence Service

'Making laws can't easily cure the trouble on our streets'

Fran Abrams
Education Correspondent

When Philip Lawrence was being stabbed to death outside his north London school last December, fellow headteacher Michael Marland was trying to protect one of his own pupils from a gang just a short distance away.

The events that day at Mr Lawrence's school, St George's in Maids Vale, led to an inquiry into school security, closely followed by a second investigation into school discipline - which brought about the measures in yesterday's Queen's Speech. But Mr Marland, head of North Westminster Community School, does not believe they can do anything to stop such incidents from happening.

There are many reasons why we have trouble on the streets, he says. There are the economics of the inner city, there are



Michael Marland: Spot problem pupils early, at

racial issues and there is the issue of how we bring up boys, who cause most of the trouble. These things are difficult to legislate for in an education bill, he admits. "When the nation looks back on the Nineties in 40 years' time

they will say we have brought up an unemployable section of the community because of our failure to care," he says.

Inside his 2,000-pupil school, discipline is under control - it was recently praised by Ofsted inspectors. But the measures proposed yesterday will make his job a little easier.

Last year North Westminster Community School had permanently excluded 15 pupils, almost none of whom found their way back into mainstream education. The new rules would allow schools to reject pupils who had been excluded twice, but they would also force local authorities to publish plans for dealing with them. Mr Marland says this must mean a dramatic increase in the number of places in special schools and units, which can cost several thousand pounds per child per year.

He believes that 4 per cent of pupils - 280,000 - need spe-

cial places. At present there are fewer than 100,000 and the numbers are being reduced.

However, Mr Marland approves of behaviour contracts, and already asks parents to pledge that they will not allow their children to bring weapons to school. The abolition of the requirement for parental consent for detentions is neither here nor there, he says. Only once has he met a parent who refused to let a child be kept in.

But what he really needs, he says, is more money to help difficult pupils and a "behaviour recovery" programme like one now in use in New Zealand. Problem pupils can be spotted at the age of five, he says, and they need intensive help to learn appropriate behaviour.

"Overall, I think this is a good thing. If I were writing a report, I would say the government has done fairly well, but could still do better," he concludes.

'The judge lies ... The sentence must be the sentence. End of story'

Louise Jury

The Crime Bill was empty words designed with an election in mind, according to one victim of crime last night.

Mark Manwaring, whose sister, Alison, and father, Matthew, were murdered for a £7,750 car in Barking, Essex, four years ago, said that the key measures did not go far enough towards ensuring the safety of the public, although they were a step in the right direction.

While the Crime Bill proposes moves to match the sentence prisoners serve more closely to the sentence imposed by the court, Flight Lieutenant Manwaring, 51, a flight navigator in the Royal Air Force, wants a harder line taken.

"When you think about it, the only person allowed to lie in court is the judge in sentencing somebody. When he says 10 years he's telling a lie



Flt Lt Manwaring: Tougher measures for public safety

to appease everybody. Ten years for a rape sounds pretty good but if he said four years which could be the true figure there would be public outrage," Flt Lt Manwaring said. "The sentence should be

the sentence. End of story. Like everything the Government does, it's never the best option but this is something to keep people quiet and make them think this is the party of law and order."

He accused the Government of "empty words", and said: "I'm not going to jump with joy over this thing."

He approved of the introduction of automatic life sentences for those convicted of a second serious violent or sexual offence, and of minimum sentences for persistent domestic burglars and drug dealers.

"That's very good. In the United States they have something called three strikes where if somebody commits a third serious crime there's an automatic life sentence," he said.

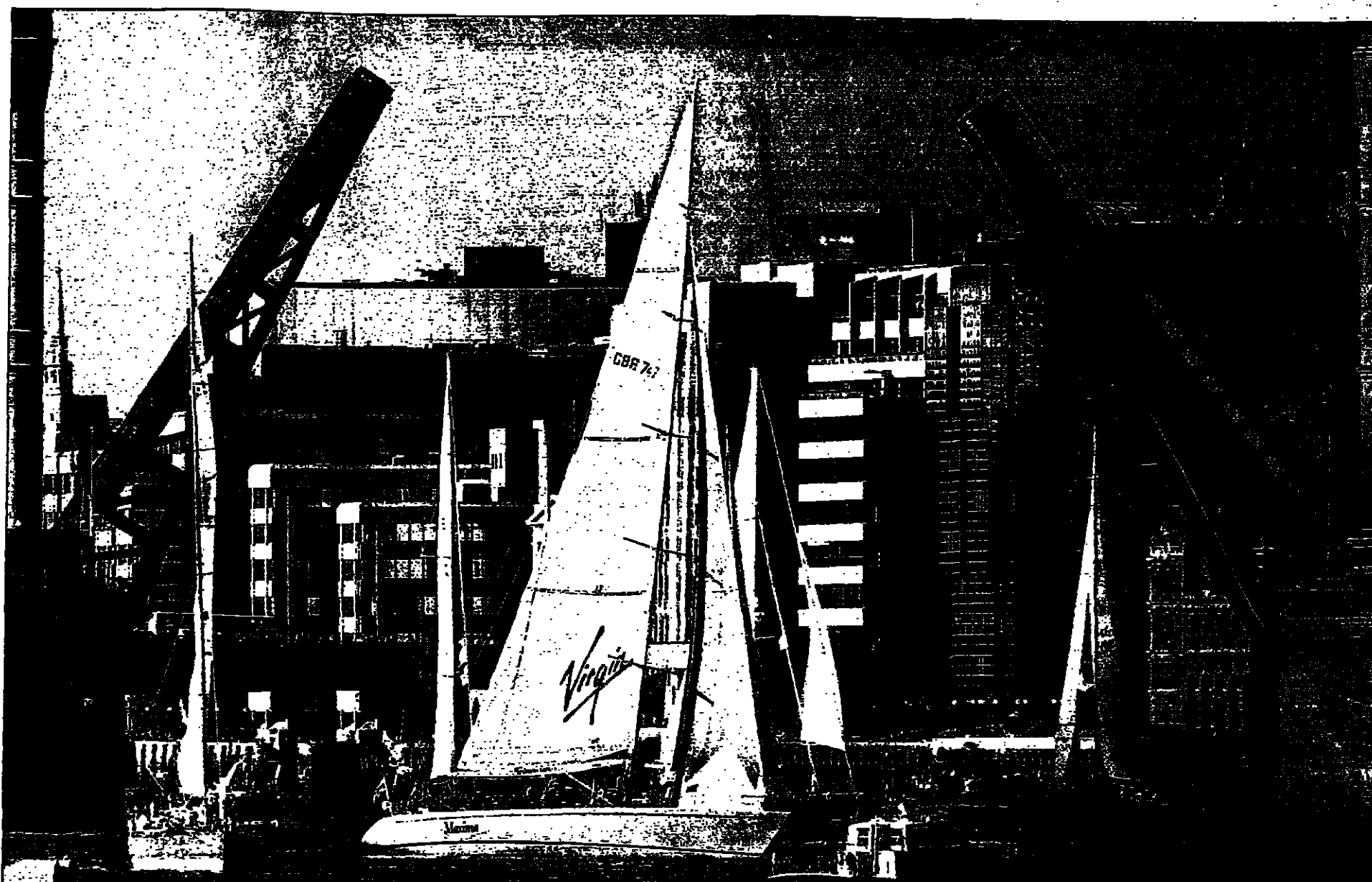
"If somebody is constantly being sentenced for violent crimes they need to be removed from circulation. While

people are inside, they're not doing damage to children and the good citizens of the country."

"You've got to give the public the benefit of the doubt, not the prisoner. But the average life sentence is only 12 years so life should mean life."

Flt Lt Manwaring said he was sympathetic to those who argued that education and tackling social problems would help cut crime but that was a long-term solution. In the meantime, the public had to be protected and justice done.

"I'm not a politician. I like to listen to them and put a common-sense perspective. What you need is justice being seen to be done so, perhaps, you can put the seal on a terrible ordeal and put it behind you. If justice hasn't been done it is like an open wound that you carry around with you for the rest of your life."



Ship shape: Yachts setting sail from St Katharine's Dock in central London yesterday to launch the Hong Kong Challenge round-the-world yachting regatta. They will sail from Southampton to Porto in Portugal on Saturday on the first leg of the event, which is backed by the United Nations as part of its Sports Against Drugs campaign

Lighting up can enhance memory

Glenda Cooper

New research suggests that smokers' perennial claim that lighting up a cigarette helps them concentrate could actually be true after scientists found that nicotine can enhance the memory by boosting the transmission of nerve impulses.

The research published today in the journal *Nature* was carried out in the United States and was partly funded by the Smokeless Tobacco Research Council, a lobby group funded by the tobacco industry.

As a highly addictive drug, nicotine is normally seen negatively as the substance that gets people hooked on tobacco. But it has been known for a long time that nicotine can improve memory and learning, and the drug has also been linked to arousal, attention and rapid information processing. The drug also affects both working and long-term memory in ways that can cause cravings years after the person has given up smoking.

In *Nature*, a group of US scientists offers an explanation for these effects. Research done at Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, Texas suggests that nicotine increases the transmission of nerve impulses in the part of the brain involved in learning and memory. It appears to do this by mimicking the effect of a neurotransmitter called acetylcholine, which

stimulates the release of other chemicals enabling nerve cells to communicate.

The group worked with rat brains to simulate the process of smoking a cigarette - during which nicotine reaches the brain 10 seconds after taking a puff. They found that when nicotine was detected in arterial blood during smoking, there were also raised levels of a molecule called glutamate, which stimulates nerve-cell activity.

The findings have relevance to Alzheimer's disease, in which a loss of acetylcholine may help explain the poor memory of sufferers. It has long been recognised that forms of dementia are less common in smokers and by developing drugs which have a similar effect to nicotine, it may be possible to exploit these useful effects without the risks of smoking.

It is not the nicotine, but the tars and carbon monoxide among more than 3,000 components of tobacco smoke that are linked with lung cancer and heart disease respectively.

However, a spokeswoman for Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) said: "Any research which is funded by the tobacco industry we would be wary of. Nicotine can have a beneficial effect but we do think that more research should be carried out. We worry that the industry will use the research to promote their products and not distinguish between nicotine and tobacco."

DAILY POEM

archy and mehitable:
the crippled cockroach

By Don Marquis

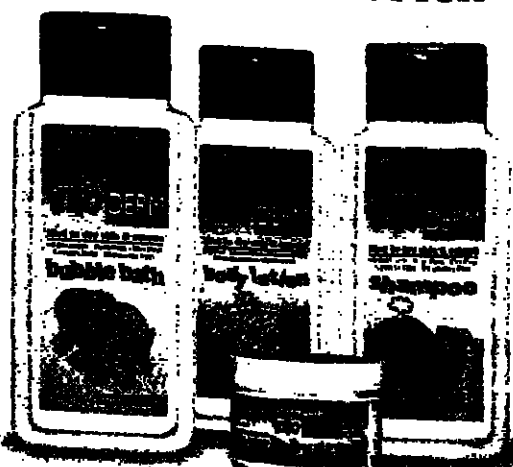
well boss i
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archy

Don Marquis died more than half a century ago, writes Jeff Adams (editor of his posthumous *archology: the long lost tales of archy and mehitable*, Bloodaxe, £7.95). At that time, many of his manuscripts and scrapbooks were simply gathered together, locked in a steamer trunk, and stored in a Brooklyn warehouse. Among those papers were literally hundreds of archy and mehitable stories. I examined the archive and made this lucky discovery: a great number of these "lost" tales of archy and mehitable had never before been published in a collection. They will make you smile, but be warned - they will also make you think.

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Romantic novelist, aged 90, is all we want for Christmas

The bets are on the children of Dunblane, novelist Catherine Cookson and Cliff Richard.

David Lister
Arts News Editor

The Christmas number one chart single has always con- founded musical taste. Neither Clive Dunn warbling 'Grandad' nor Benny Hill reciting 'Ernie' (he drove the fastest milk van in the West) would have them dancing in the clubs at any other season.

But Christmas brings out a different class of record buyer and a different class of record. Never more so than this year.

The names being touted for the 1996 Christmas number one include some of the young- est contenders — the brothers and sisters of the Dunblane vic- tims — against unquestionably the oldest, 90-year-old novelist Catherine Cookson singing 'My Way' and 'Danny Boy'.

Even in the name of season- al goodwill, it is optimistic of Miss Cookson's publisher, Ban- tam, to issue an audio cassette of its 'best-selling romantic writer singing some best-selling standards. But William Hill Bookmakers said yesterday that the venerable Miss Cookson



Top of the pops: Catherine Cookson (left) singing 'My Way' at 50/1, Boyzone (centre) at 6/1 and favourites, the Spice Girls, at 11/8 are in the running for the top single spot



All-time Top 10

- 1 'Do They Know It's Christmas?' Band Aid, 1984
- 2 'Mary's Boy Child/ Oh My Lord' Boney M, 1978
- 3 'Last Christmas' Wham! 1984
- 4 'Merry Xmas Everybody' Slade, 1973
- 5 'Mary's Boy Child' Harry Belafonte, 1967
- 6 'White Christmas' Bing Crosby, 1977
- 7 'Mistletoe and Wine' Cliff Richard, 1988
- 8 'When A Child Is Born' Johnny Mathis, 1976
- 9 'Happy Xmas (War is Over)' John Lennon, 1980
- 10 'Lonely This Christmas' Mud, 1974

Taken From The Top 10 of Music (Headline, 1993)

had entered the betting, admit- tedly at a modest 50 to 1, to be number one at Christmas.

The moving tribute by the Dunblane children in which they sing Bob Dylan's 'Knock- ing On Heaven's Door' does not actually feature in the bet- ting produced yesterday by William Hill.

Spokesman Gary Burton said: "This is a light-hearted market and this is not a light- hearted subject. We all hope it will be number one, but we are not taking bets on it. If it is num- ber one, we will pay out on the number two."

Meanwhile, the betting fav- orite to be the Christmas num- ber one, or even number two, are the fashionable Spice Girls (a hot 11/8 favourite). There fol- lows the whole seasonal range,

from the presumably pre-natal croonings of Madonna (5/1 second favourite) through teeny bop idols Boyzone (6/1) and El- ton John duetting with Luciano Pavarotti (10/1), to a little-fan- cied Michael Jackson (16/1) and the eternally young Smurfs (16/1), and, to show that any- thing's possible at Christmas, even the Sex Pistols at 33/1.

More than 30 acts feature in the William Hill betting, but Richard Park, Capital Radio group programme director se- lected Robson & Jerome and

the Spice Girls as the acts most likely to succeed. "There are some big contenders and there's going to be even more jostling this year," he said.

For those who want to bet on seasonal schmalz, but don't fancy Catherine Cookson, Sir

Cliff Richard's bid for a fourth Christmas number one (with the single 'Be With Me'), is, sur- prisingly, a 50/1 long shot — the first time in his career that Sir Cliff has been judged about as likely as Catherine Cookson to top the charts.

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For those who want to bet on seasonal schmalz, but don't fancy Catherine Cookson, Sir

Judges slash cash for injury victims

Three large damages awards for personal injuries were slashed by up to a third today when the Court of Appeal ruled against a new and more generous approach to the calculation of compensation.

The reductions follow suc- cessful appeals by the defence insurers in each case.

Thelma Wells, 60, who was awarded £1.619m for injuries re- ceived in a car crash saw her damages reduced by £532,000. She has permanent brain dam- age.

James Thomas, 7, who suf- fered cerebral palsy at birth due to a hospital blunder, had his award of £1.285m against Brighton Health Authority cut by about £300,000.

Kelvin Page, a steel worker, lost £280,000 of £906,000 dam- ages against Sheerness Steel for the brain damage he suffered when he was speared by a hot metal bar.

The High Court judges who made the awards fixed higher than normal sums for future losses and expenses after ac- cepting evidence that the only safe way of investing the money would be to put it in low risk index linked government secu- rities, which earn only 3 per cent a year. Normally awards are based on a 4.5 per cent return from equities and gilts.

The three awards followed

recommendations from a work- ing party which were adopted in a Law Commission report but are not law.

Lords Justices Hirst, Auld and Thorpe ruled that the orig- inal guidelines should still be fol- lowed. It was not for the courts of their own volition to adopt a new practice. Lawyers for the three victims are to seek leave to appeal to the House of Lords.

Mr Page's solicitor Paul Kit- son said: "The judgment means plaintiffs will have to continue to gamble their awards on the stock market in order to ensure a sufficient income for the rest of their lives."

The original award to Mr Page reflected the seriousness of his injuries and his substan- tial care costs.

The rejection by the Court of Appeal of the trial judge's more generous approach is a blow, not only to Mr Page, but to victims of accidents in the fu- ture."

James Thomas's legal team said the decision would have se- rious consequences for him and his family.

The damages for the neg- ligent treatment which injured him would now be insufficient to guarantee the level of care which had been planned for his future. He has a normal life ex- pectancy.

Midweek lottery dismays critics

Critics have reacted with dismay to the decision to create a second National Lottery draw with an estimated jackpot of £4m.

Anti-gaming bodies and the gambling industry were united with Church leaders in con- demning the decision yesterday by the lottery regulator, Oflot, to go ahead with the Wednes- day draw. It is likely to begin in the New Year and will have the same format of six numbers from 49 balls as the present Sat- urday game.

Announcing the move, the lottery regulator Peter Davis said: "It's a natural and timely development in the life of our National Lottery. It will clearly be of enormous benefit to the

good causes, which is our pri- mary objective."

However, critics were angry about the move which they said had come too soon after the es- tablishment of the main draw, nearly two years ago and the in- troduction of scratchcards.

A spokesman for Gamblers' Anonymous said the move was a second nail in the coffin for a nation of gamblers. "The only way Camelot can make more money is if ordinary people lose more money. People do spend a lot more money than they can afford on the lottery."

William Hill, the bookmak- ers, said the move was unwel- come while a spokesman for the Church of England, which has consistently argued that the lottery offers false hope and en- courages greed, said there should be an "independent re- view of the whole operation".

Mr Davis said players will be able to buy tickets for either draw — Wednesday or Saturday — not just the next one due, as the operators Camelot wanted. Camelot said the Wednesday jackpot would be £4m and Sat- urday's £2m. The increase in sales will keep Camelot on course for £32m total sales by the end of its seven-year licence period.

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news

Banned for a debt of £32,000. But he didn't owe a penny

Glenda Cooper

Jaz Stichaw could not believe his eyes. He had been turned down for a Barclaycard because he was £32,000 in the red.

But Mr Stichaw had never once been in debt. A 32-year-old lawyer he had always been careful with his finances. Barclaycard had been informed that this was his financial status by the credit-reference agency Equifax and had turned down his application accordingly.

As a lawyer, Mr Stichaw knew what action to take, deciding to sue Equifax, eventually settling out of court. But for other people the way forward may not be so clear.

Credit-reference agencies have claimed that the mistakes they make account for less than 1 per cent. But the Data Protection Registrar is now considering investigating the accuracy of credit-reference agencies after a survey which suggested that errors on people's files may be far more common than previously thought.

Each week, nearly 400,000 people apply for credit - whether it is setting up a bank account, applying for a store card or getting an interest-free loan on a car. Credit-reference files provide a snapshot of how a person manages their fi-

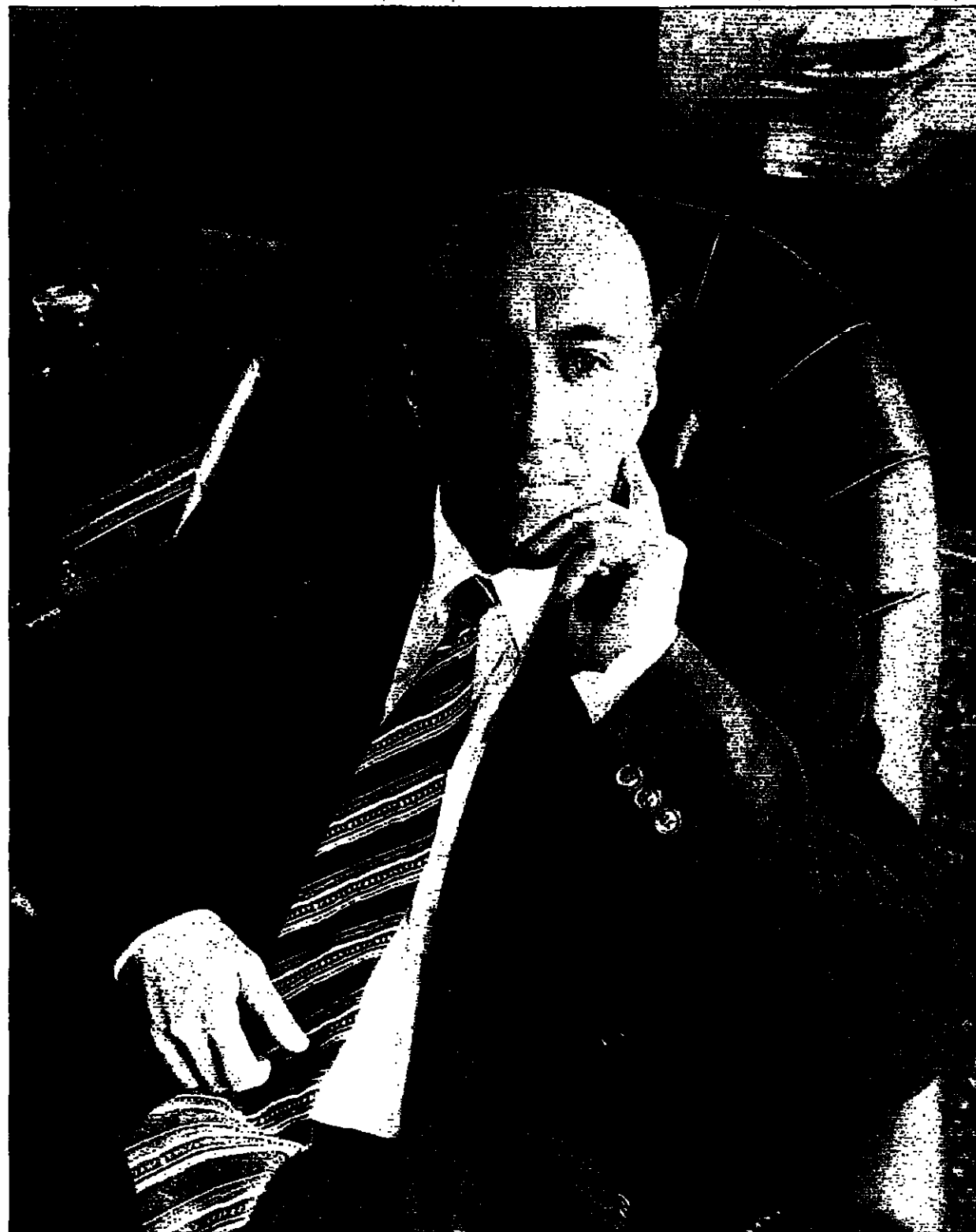
nances. Negative information about defaults of county court judgments for non-payment of debts stays on your record for six years and can lead to people being turned down.

There are three credit-reference agencies in Britain - Equifax, CCN and CDMS. Between them they hold 135 million files containing electoral roll information, public record information and information supplied by lenders.

A survey for tonight's edition of the Channel 4 programme, *Dash*, found that a third of people had some sort of mistake on their files. Some were minor ones which could lead to confusion but others were serious which could lead to people being wrongly refused credit.

Of the 30 people who sent off for their files, 13 people found errors. These included mistakenly attributed court judgments, factual errors concerning mortgages and wrong residents at the wrong address.

More serious situations can result as Mr Stichaw found some time ago when his application for Barclaycard was turned down. "I was completely disgusted that Equifax had passed such information to Barclaycard because it was wrong and highly offensive," he said. "Equifax had told Barclaycard



Would you credit it? Jaz Stichaw, who was refused a Barclaycard because of false information. Photograph: Joan Russell

that I had over £32,000 worth of debt and I was completely horrified because I'm careful about finances and I certainly had no debts.

As a lawyer I recognised that that was slanderous. And because of that I issued a high court writ. "The case was eventually settled out of court."

David Smith of the Data Protection Office said: "It's a slur on their character, they

can't understand why it has happened. It's because of some personal information they have no control over. We get people phoning our office in tears about these decisions... they really are important to people."

He said that the ombudsman was considering a feasibility study to look into the amount of errors creeping into files. "At present, we only see people who complain - these people know

they have a problem," he said. "But others may not know if there are problems. If you apply for credit and get it you may be quite happy but it doesn't mean the information on your file is necessarily right, and it could affect you in future applications."

"There's a lot more credit-reference agencies could do to ensure the information is right."

Kevin Still, group marketing

director for Equifax said: "The majority of errors occur in the information supplied to us, such as county court judgments or information supplied by the lenders themselves."

"We get 1,300 requests a day of which 20 per cent result in queries. Of those, several require detailed investigation and it is in the order of one in a thousand that need some change because there is a material error."

BA to the fore as ticketless air travel takes off

James Cusick

British Airways is on course to abolish paper tickets on its domestic flights by next spring. In line with moves by international airlines worldwide, BA believes the era of "ticketless" air travel is about to take off.

On BA's Gatwick-to-Abandon route, ticketless trials have been in progress since August. Passengers with hand baggage only simply reserve their seat by telephone using their credit card. At the airport they check in at a special desk by swiping their card, and choose their seat by touch-screen technology. The only paper they handle is their boarding card.

Passengers with luggage go through the same procedure, but check in their bags normally and also receive a boarding card.

BA said yesterday that the system had so far proved swifter and simpler than the old-fashioned ticket system. If an extension of the trial to some travel agents proves successful, they "hope to have a ticketless domestic service by next spring".

British Airways currently deals with 5.8 million passengers annually on its United Kingdom internal routes. With the International Air Transport Authority (IATA) claiming that processing paper tickets costs around £5 per ticket against only £1 for an electronic ticket, the potential savings - which could be passed on to passengers - are substantial.

Ditching paper and replacing it with electronic technology is now being tested by the world's leading airlines. Passport and immigration checks at airports are also likely to be speeded up by electronic checks as airlines and airport authorities introduce "smart-card" technology.

According to the IATA, paper ticketing will soon be a thing of the past, with "intelligent" ticketing likely to be the norm by 2005. IATA is currently looking at how it can introduce and enforce its standards for the latter.

In the United States, United

Airlines has so far introduced electronic ticketing on 40 per cent of its domestic services, using similar procedures to BA.

IBM, the computer giant whose early business included processing immigrants at US ports, has gone back to its roots with newly developed "smart-card" technology that is being tested at Bermuda's international airport. The "fastgate" immigration card is designed to put an end to long passport queues for arrivals from international flights.

Essentially involving an electronic passport, passengers apply to encode their passport details and the unique pattern of their own handprint, on a form of frequent flyer card, similar to a credit card.

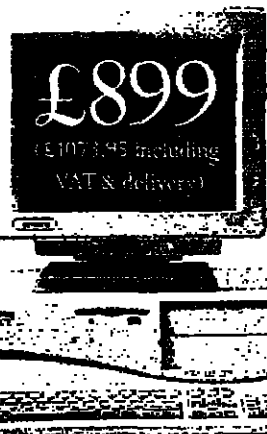
At the airport, passengers simply swipe the card through the digital passport desk, place their hand on an identification screen, and are informed whether they pass or not. IBM is confident that the system can be in worldwide use within five years. Bermuda airport, which handles half a million passengers each year, will test the new technology next year.

If successful, the Bermuda test will need to be expanded, with the "fastgate" process being tested out at one of the larger international airports. It is understood that IBM has already held initial discussions with the airport authorities at London Heathrow and at Frankfurt airport in Germany. The Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland has upheld complaints by the International Federation of Airline Pilots' Associations and the Irish Airline Pilots' Association against an airline for making a joke out of last August's Sudan Airways hijacking at Stansted airport in Essex. A Ryanair advertisement showed a photograph of the hijacked jet and said: "It's amazing what lengths people will go to fly cheaper than Ryanair." Ryanair has apologised and said the "light-hearted" advertisement would not be repeated.

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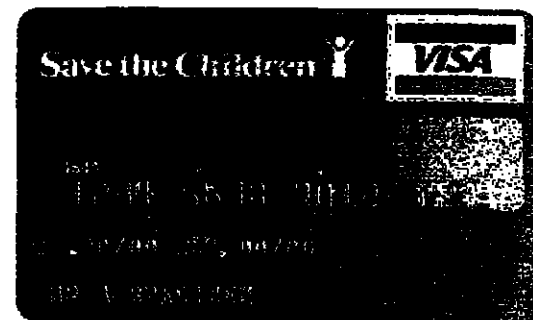
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news

Cover-up kept files from jails watchdog

Jason Bennett
Crime Correspondent

Vital files on inmates were deliberately withheld from the jails watchdog by Prison Service staff who in one case lied about the involvement of the Home Secretary, according to a report published yesterday.

The newly appointed Prison Ombudsman, Sir Peter Woodhead, details in his first report an internal battle he has waged with sections of the Prison Service to obtain information about some of the complaints made by inmates.

His report covers the 14 months up to the end of 1995 and involves the investigation of 424 grievances.

He said that he investigated a complaint made by a prisoner that a decision which concerned him had been taken on political grounds. Sir Peter's report said: "This was repeatedly denied by the Prison Service. My investigations revealed the existence of a memo from a senior Prison Service official which confirmed that political considerations had come into the decision."

He also said that records about security incidents "are all too frequently sketchy and lacking in detail. Some are unsigned, others are undated, and few make clear the nature and reliability of the source."

Sections of the service removed documents from files and refused to provide information which involved advice to ministers, arguing it was outside the ombudsman's remit.

Sir Peter said: "However, staff in some sections in Prison Service headquarters have occasionally gone further by refusing to supply the file and copying to me only those documents from it which they regarded as relevant to the investigation." He added that some of the co-operation was

"lardy" and in nearly a tenth of cases the papers take more than a month to arrive.

The row led earlier this year to Michael Howard, the Home Secretary, imposing restraints on Sir Peter's powers to investigate inmates' grievances: they restrict his access to documents making him dependent on what the Prison Service chooses to hand over and it removes his right to investigate or even check any decisions by ministers or advice to ministers.

Sir Peter said yesterday that he had considered resigning but decided he still had an important job and that the political decision only involved some 6 per cent of the complaints.

However he added yesterday: "There are certainly parts of the Prison Service who are still not being as co-operative as I would wish them to be. It's certainly part of the culture. I don't know whether it is because they are trying to hide something."

Sir Peter, the first occupant of a post recommended by Lord Woolf's inquiry into the 1990 Strangeways riots in Manchester, received more than 2,000 complaints in the first 14 months. Of these 424 were accepted for investigation, 44 per cent being upheld. Ninety per cent of the Ombudsman's recommendations were accepted by the Prison Service. Most complaints were about disciplinary adjudication's, transfers to other types of jails, handling of private property, and security grading.

Sir Peter did, however, praise the way the Prison Service dealt with the majority of complaints and said there were many examples of positive relationships between staff and prisoners.

Richard Tilt, the director-general of the Prison Service, said yesterday that Sir Peter had a vital role to play. "I'm a great supporter of the ombudsman."

Trust ordains: let there be (low-energy) light



Switch in time: Martin Drury, director of the National Trust, installs a £13 low-energy lightbulb at Polesden Lacey, a Trust property in Surrey yesterday. Photograph: Tom Flinton

Stephen Goodwin
Heritage Correspondent

The National Trust is to install more than 13,000 low-energy lightbulbs in its properties over the next few months, saving thousands of pounds on electricity bills.

As Martin Drury, director-general of the Trust, said yesterday: "In energy-saving terms, the National Trust is probably best-known for keeping the blinds down and the heating low in its country houses."

The lightbulbs initiative is a more progressive approach and one which the Energy Saving Trust (EST) hopes will serve as an example to ordinary, as well as stately, home-owners.

The £12 to £13 cost of an energy-saving bulb is a deterrent, compared with 50p for a conventional 60-watt bulb. But EST estimates that domestic users would break even on cost after 12 months and then save £10 a year.

Low-energy bulbs have a life of around 10,000 hours com-

pared with 1,000 for a conventional bulb.

Under the auspices of the EST, regional electricity companies are subsidising the bulk purchase of low-energy bulbs for the National Trust. Altogether, 13,132 ordinary tungsten filament bulbs will be replaced by compact fluorescent lamps.

This "retro-fitting" is expected to save the charity £51,500 on the cost of lightbulbs and £102,400 a year in reduced electricity bills. There is also a potential benefit for the

wider environment. If the reduced demand for electricity was reflected in power station output, there would be an annual saving in emissions of carbon dioxide - the main global warming gas - of 850 tonnes.

A system of energy audits for all Trust properties has been initiated and staff have been trained to be more energy conscious. Energy-saving guidelines have been drawn up for its historic houses, offices, holiday cottages and the ubiquitous shops and tea rooms.

Mr Drury said the use of low-energy lightbulbs would enable funds to be released for essential conservation work.

The Trust began its efficiency programme yesterday, with the installation of saver bulbs at Polesden Lacey, an elegant country house near Dorking, Surrey, which was once the home of Mrs Ronald Greville, a well-known Edwardian hostess and hardly the sort of woman who would have to change her own lightbulbs.

Britain switches on

Local authorities, English Heritage and the Co-op Retail Society are among major organisations catching on to the benefits of the saver bulbs. On the domestic front, one in five of the country's 24.5 million households has at least one low-energy bulb, compared to 8 per cent in 1993.

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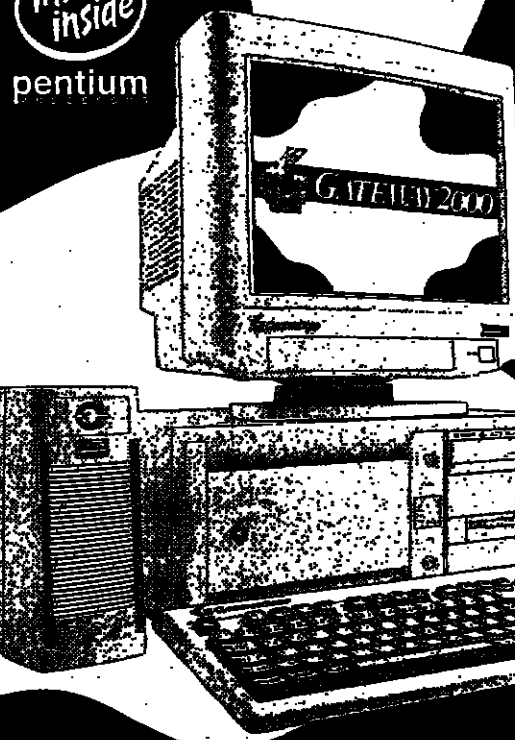
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On West Bank they bestow hero status on French President, but the reaction at home is cooler

Chirac demands a state for Palestine

Patrick Cockburn
Jerusalem

Advocating a Palestinian state as the best way to achieve peace in the Middle East, French President Jacques Chirac yesterday became the first foreign leader to address the Palestinian legislature. The French leader's visit to Israel and the autonomous Palestinian enclaves has become politically highly charged since his verbal confrontation with Israeli security men in the Old City of Jerusalem on Tuesday was shown on television screens across the Middle East.

Greeted by crowds shouting "Vive La France" in Ramallah, the autonomous Palestinian enclave 18 miles north of Jerusalem, Mr Chirac told the 88 member Palestinian Legislative Council: "A Palestinian state is not in any way a danger to the security of anyone. On the contrary, a Palestinian state and comprehensive and just peace guarantees security for all." Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister, and his government are wholly opposed to Palestinian statehood.

The French President called for a greater French and European role in the Middle East peace talks in which the United States has monopolised the role of mediator.

He said: "I salute the US role, but I see the peace process losing its breath because of the loss of trust. I see the European and French role in building more trust."

Mr Chirac criticised changes being made on the ground in Jerusalem, such as Israel's confiscation of land and the demolition of houses, as well as the economic closure imposed on the West Bank and Gaza.

All this will have delighted Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian leader, though his strategy re-

mains primarily to get as much American support as possible during the negotiations on the Israeli withdrawal from Hebron.

The Israeli daily *Haaretz* said yesterday that both the Israeli and Palestinian leaders, convinced that President Bill Clinton will win re-election, want to impress him with their flexibility, but also "to appear to their public as diligent warriors battling over the last detail."

In the rest of the Middle East Mr Chirac's brief fracas in Jerusalem has won him widespread praise. The Syrian daily *Tishreen* said: "Because Chirac came to the region to urge Israel's rulers to adhere to the land-for-peace principle as the basis of the peace process, he was met with deliberate provocation by the Israeli leaders."

In Tehran, Ali Akbar Velayati, the Foreign Minister, said: "The presence of Paris in the region indicates that the European Union has come to its senses and wants to play a role independent of the US."

France has sought to limit US predominance in the Middle East twice already this year: by questioning the continuation of sanctions against Iraq; and by carrying out an independent diplomatic role during Israel's bombardment of Lebanon, the so-called Grapes of Wrath Operation, in April.

In neither case were French initiatives productive. In the two main conflicts in the Middle East, the Arab-Israeli dispute and the cold war against Saddam Hussein and Iraq, the US remains the only foreign power with real influence.

As Mr Chirac flew to Gaza the US and Israeli officials said that an agreement is imminent over the redeployment of the Israeli army in Hebron, the Palestinian city of 100,000 in which



Driving force: Jacques Chirac and Yasser Arafat leading a motorcade through Ramallah yesterday Photograph: Reuters

live some 400 Jewish settlers. Martin Indyk, the American ambassador, said yesterday: "We are relatively close to the end of these negotiations." Israel said that delay on an agreement is because Mr Arafat is stalling for time—possibly until after the US presidential election.

The changes in the Hebron agreement made at the insistence of Mr Netanyahu appear largely cosmetic. The main Palestinian concessions were made last year when Mr Arafat agreed, in effect, to partition the city with 20 per cent of it remaining under Israeli control to protect the settlers.

The main Israeli settlement at Kiryat Arba, with a population of 7,000, was never affected by the interim agreement signed by the last Labour government and now to be put into effect by Mr Netanyahu.

French media avoid president's 'intifada'

Mary Dejevsky
Paris

Jacques Chirac was all over the front pages of France's national newspapers yesterday, having headed news bulletins throughout the previous evening with what were described as "the major diplomatic incidents in Jerusalem". "Chirac wages his intifada," said the front-page headline on the left-of-centre *Libération*, above a picture of the French president pushing Israeli security guards away.

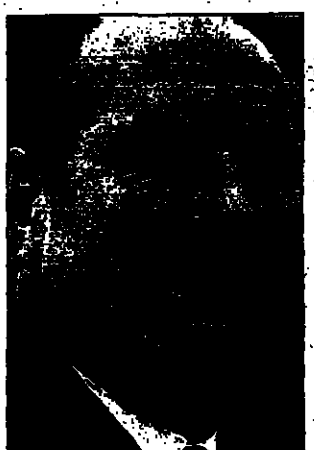
Others contented themselves with "Chirac's fit of rage" and the satirical weekly, *Le Canard Enchaîné* (which, by happy chance, appears on Wednesdays) offered: "Nervous diplomacy, the mediator gets angry" and a crop of cartoons. One, depicting Mr Chirac and Mr Netanyahu side by side, had a bystander saying: "They'll need a mediator just to get them to shake hands."

Aside from enjoying the drama, however, the French media seemed reluctant to take a stand one way or the other on Mr Chirac's *démarche*. To be sure, there had been diplomatic incidents, but both sides had decided the argument should be closed, and most commentators respectfully followed suit.

The "line", in so far as there was one, was expressed by prominent commentator, Alain Duhamel, speaking on the radio station, Europe 1. "The explanation for the incident in Jerusalem is much less Chirac's style — warmth, spontaneity, straight-talking and seeking contact with the people — than a basic difference of opinion. The Israelis regard Jerusalem as their capital and their sovereignty over it as indivisible."

Europeans in general, and France in particular, do not accept the annexation of the Arab part of Jerusalem and don't recognise the three-Holy City as the capital of Israel. The incident in Jerusalem will from now on signify this difference.

The only hints of criticism came, predictably, but gently, from the left of centre. In *Libération*, the paper's foreign



Jacques Chirac: His unbridled outspokenness worries some

affairs commentator, Jacques Anjalie, asked whether, even if one believed that a Palestinian state was desirable in the long term, it was "judicious" to propose one's own services as "mediator" — or, in Elysée parlance, "facilitator of peace."

A similar tone was adopted by the leader of the Socialist Party, Lionel Jospin, who appeared to question the wisdom of Mr Chirac's outburst, noting that "diplomacy is a difficult art". Mr Jospin spent his early career in the foreign ministry.

The wider public seemed almost uninterested, preoccupied with matters closer to home, such as jobs, pay and strikes. The cheering from the



Lionel Jospin: Questioned wisdom of Mr Chirac's outburst

home crowd that might once have accompanied a French leader on foreign trips now seems muted, despite the high foreign policy profile Mr Chirac has adopted since his election.

Even those taking note of Mr Chirac's performance seemed uncertain which of two opposing instincts to follow: one was to shout "hurrah" for a straight-talking, France-promoting leader unafraid to take on Israelis, their security services and, indirectly, the Americans — even if his strongest words were uttered in the enemy's tongue, English.

The other instinct, however, was to worry that Mr Chirac's unbridled outspokenness might be more of a liability than an asset. No media commentators were indecisive enough to enumerate examples of Chiraquian diplomacy, but if they had, they might have included some of the following:

His lambasting of The Netherlands' prime minister for running a "drugs state" at his first EU dinner at the Elysée last year; the timing of the nuclear test announcement to coincide with the anniversary of the sinking of the *Rainbow Warrior*; his accusation of "spinelessness" against Western powers over Bosnia; his failure to warn the Germans that he was ending military service in France; and his ridiculing of Italy's determination to be among the first to join a single European currency.

In each case, diplomats were left to sort out the mess. At the Quai d'Orsay, there is said to be deep gloom.

Before Mr Chirac set off for the Middle East, one foreign ministry official was quoted as saying that "he was poorly prepared" and that starting the tour in Damascus was calculated to "infuriate the Israelis and weaken the resolve of moderate Arabs".

"You can't," he reportedly said, "present yourself as Assad's best friend and then aspire to play the role of mediator." If only Mr Chirac could have foreseen what would happen in Israel.

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There's a great deal going on

Katherine Butler
Strasbourg
and John Lichfield

Defying Israeli and American sensitivities on an extended European role in the peace process, EU foreign ministers will try to overcome differences on the question of a European envoy to the Middle East when they meet in Luxembourg next Monday.

The appointment was proposed by EU heads of government earlier this month but so far has not materialised due to divisions over the mandate the envoy should be given. Irish Foreign Minister Dick Spring said in Strasbourg yesterday there was a clear desire for a more "hands on" role for the EU in the peace process, although he conceded that definitive agreement on neither the scope of the mandate nor the identity of the future envoy could be guaranteed to emerge from Monday's meeting.

Jacques Delors is among those who have been suggested as a potential candidate for the post, but there is strong resistance among some member states to any appointee who might be seen as bringing along too much "political baggage".

The fear being voiced in other capitals, however, is that the appointee will have to be a senior political personality rather than a career diplomat if the EU's emissary is to have any hope of exerting influence.

Mr Spring denied there was

competition between the EU and the US in a bid to shape the direction of the talks but he insisted Europe's economic weight in the region could not be ignored. "The EU is the major trading partner for every country in the region and indeed is the biggest donor to the Palestinian authority", he said. Europe's biggest political leverage lies in the fact that it accounts for half of Israel's foreign trade and 85% of aid to the Palestinian people.

One of the best ways of advancing peace would be to guarantee the economic regeneration of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Mr Spring said. "I have to say I don't see any other way of that happening without the active involvement — in cash terms or otherwise — of the European Union", he added.

Mr Spring, who visited the Middle East on the EU's behalf three weeks ago, played down the prospect of Israeli objections to the appointment of an envoy. He was also careful to stress that the desire is not for an EU seat at the negotiating table, with Irish officials adding that the emphasis would be on appointing a close observer of both the talks and the channelling of economic aid.

The Foreign Secretary, Malcolm Rifkind, who is to visit Israel at the end of next week, said yesterday that the appointment of an EU envoy should not be ruled out, but warned against appointment "for its own sake".

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Pakistan orders Taliban to end Kabul crackdown

Caroline Lees
Kabul

The self-styled Islamic fundamentalist government set up last month in Kabul by the Taliban militia has been told it has become an international laughing-stock by a Pakistani diplomat sent to advise the regime.

Pictures of Taliban soldiers unravelling videotapes and smashing televisions on the streets of the Afghan capital have played into the Western media's hands and made the regime look ridiculous, the diplomat said.

At a meeting last week with Taliban leaders, the envoy insisted that the movement should soften the hardline Islamic regime it imposed on the city if it wants to win international support. According to one source, the Taliban have been ordered to "drop the mullah act and behave in a more international manner".

Since it took over the city, the Taliban have issued a series of decrees which angered people in Kabul and outraged world opinion.

Women have been banned from working and girls from going to school and university. Men have been ordered to grow beards and wear turbans. Western clothes have been outlawed - even traffic police have

been told to stop wearing ties, as they are considered "too English".

Details of last week's secret meeting appear to confirm the close working relationship between Pakistan and the Taliban. Despite denials, Pakistan has supported the Taliban movement since it started, providing weapons and financial backing. It is preparing to reopen its embassy in Kabul - diplomats have spent the past week searching for offices in the city.

On Kabul streets there are signs the Taliban have listened to the advice of their Pakistani advisers. Women, earlier ordered to cover themselves from head to foot in public and told they would be beaten if they left their homes without a male relative, can be seen in the bazaar unaccompanied.

Schoolgirls have been told they will be given automatic passes to this year's examinations without having to sit them. Female Western journalists, banned from Taliban press conferences at first, have been given access to leaders.

An official said the recent softening of the Taliban had been noticeable, but admitted that the new administration faced a dilemma.

"Some Taliban leaders know they have to win international approval but they cannot try too

hard or its fighters will think they are selling out to the West and abandoning the Islamic principles they have fought so hard for. The UN has said it will not recognise the new government because it will not allow women to work and girls to go to school. The Taliban know that if they give in and allow girls back to school their fighters will desert them."

Yesterday Amir Motaqi, who is styled minister for culture and information, tried to please both sides. "We are not against the education of women and girls. We have stopped them from working and going to school because the circumstances are not yet suitable for them to do so. It is not yet possible to give Islamic education to women and children."

He acknowledged that the Taliban needed to win international recognition but said it would never compromise its Islamic principles.

Talk of a truce between the Taliban and former government forces seems to have been abandoned after both sides admitted they could not agree on conditions. Abdul Rashid Dostam, the northern warlord, appeared to join forces with Ahmed Shah Massoud, the former government's military commander, in a big offensive against the Taliban.



Suffer the children: A girl peers through a makeshift curtain in a Kabul hospital, all of which have been told by the Taliban to segregate males and females. Photograph: AFP

Zaire drifts towards ethnic war

David Orr
Nairobi

Full-scale war was last night threatening to engulf the volatile Great Lakes region of central Africa as fighting continued in eastern Zaire and 250,000 people fled for safety.

Unable or unwilling to contain fighting between its army and rebel groups, the Zairean government has turned on its neighbours, Rwanda and Burundi, accusing them of provoking the conflict. With the crisis deepening by the hour, aid officials are warning there could be a humanitarian disaster similar to the 1994 Rwanda genocide and exodus.

Anarchic at the best of times, Zaire is all but rudderless at the moment, its ailing president, Mobutu Sese Seko, still convalescing in Switzerland after surgery for prostate cancer. His country's remote Kivu region could now be consumed by the same ethnic hatreds which two years ago tore Rwanda apart and which bedevil Burundi with growing ferocity.

Zaire's mountainous eastern area has been simmering with unrest since more than 1 million Rwandans, members of the Hutu majority, fled there after the 1994 genocide.

Fighting has spread in recent weeks since Zairean troops became embroiled in ethnic clashes between local Zaireans and settlers of Rwandan Tutsi origin.

The UN fears Rwanda and Burundi, whose armies are both dominated by Tutsis, could be drawn in on the side of Zaire's ethnic Tutsis.

President Mobutu has sent a message to his divided government that its top priority should be the protection of national unity. Zaire's state radio issued pleas to the populace to contribute money to help the country's impoverished army. "The war in the east concerns all Zaireans," it said.

In recent days, the Zairean army has brought reinforcements of troops and artillery to Bukavu, the provincial capital of South Kivu.

However, if it came to all-out conflict between Zaire and Rwanda, few observers believe Zaire could withstand an all-out attack by the well-disciplined and motivated Rwandan army. Zaire's armed forces are ragged, unpaid and poorly trained.

A Zairean government spokesman said yesterday that "elements of the Rwandan army" attacked parts of North Kivu, but were repulsed by Zairean forces.

Rwanda's Tutsi-led regime has denied entering Zaire. Yet its leaders are known to be in-

creasingly incensed at the Zairean army's attacks on ethnic Tutsis, whose presence in eastern Zaire goes back 200 years.

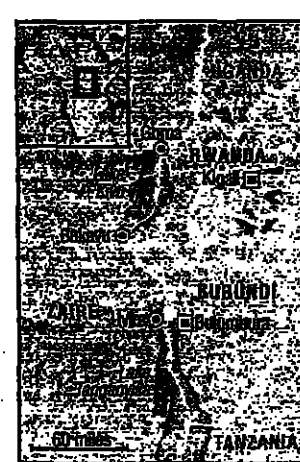
The Rwandan government is also frustrated by the continuing presence of its nationals in the region's refugee camps. Rwandan Hutu extremists, committed to returning home by force, have been launching frequent raids into Rwanda from their bases in the camps.

According to some sources, Zaire has been arming and training the Rwandan Hutu rebels and arms supplies are believed to have been allowed to land at Goma airport by the Zairean authorities.

While there is no evidence of Burundian troops attacking Zaire, there have been reports of Tutsi militias launching cross-border raids from Burundi.

Burundi's Tutsi-dominated government, which has been isolated by international sanctions since a military coup in July, has resolutely refused to negotiate with Hutu rebels seeking to overthrow it. The Burundian rebels, like their Rwandan counterparts, are operating from eastern Zaire.

With the Great Lakes region increasingly polarised along Hutu-Tutsi lines, the three coun-



tries' individual conflicts risk exploding in an ethnic fireball. In such a conflagration, borders and diplomacy would seem meaningless.

The large movement of refugees and civilians of recent days could be the precursor of a humanitarian emergency on a massive scale.

With all journalists ordered out of eastern Zaire and aid workers unable to travel safely, the true extent of the suffering there has yet to emerge.

"We are definitely facing a looming catastrophe if food supplies cannot arrive in Bukavu," a United Nations World Food Programme spokesman said. "We need food there immediately."

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welcome

Fury over 'mongrel' remark

Sydney — Port Lincoln, one of Australia's most remote towns, has sprung to national attention over a row surrounding its mayor, Peter Davis, who yesterday refused to retract his description of the children of mixed-race couples as "mongrels", writes Robert Milliken.

Mr Davis's outburst is the latest in the debate over non-white immigration, Aboriginal affairs and multiculturalism, which has swept Australia since the election last March of the conservative Liberal-National coalition government led by John Howard.

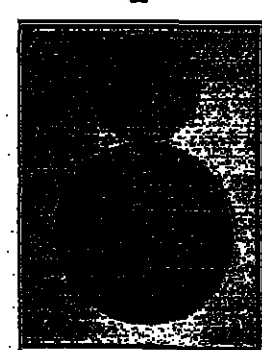
Outraged ethnic groups called for the sacking of Mr Davis, who said: "If you are a child of a mixed race, particularly Asian-Caucasian or Aboriginal-white, you are a mongrel. That's what happens when you cross dogs or whatever. I'm not a racist... but I do recognise that cultures are different."

Nine of the town's 10 councillors resigned after he refused to withdraw his remarks.



Modern society is plagued with record numbers of wild, untameable children. But modern society is fighting back, with a controversial psychoactive drug. Hester Lacey investigates the Ritalin generation

Prize fight... it's Turner Prize time again, and the four contenders on the shortlist are as quirkily colourful as ever. Andy Beckett talks exclusively to Simon Patterson, Douglas Gordon, Craigie Horsfield and Gary Hume (creator of the 'Snowman', right)



Merrell Williams was a humble legal clerk. Then he stole some documents that might wreck the tobacco industry. Now he's scared. Peter Pringle meets the ultimate whistle-blower

Plus: Nicholas Barber on the joy of Friends

IN THIS WEEKEND'S INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY

APR 10 1996

On United Nations Day, David Usborne reports that a radical overhaul is being considered UN fights over plans to slash back bureaucracy

Efforts to kick-start a radical overhaul of the sprawling web of bureaucracies that make up the United Nations have triggered a firestorm of controversy within the organisation as agency heads scramble to defend their fiefs.

One dramatic proposal, informally circulated by the head of the United Nations Development Programme, Gustave Speth, has caused widespread fury in UN corridors in New York headquarters and in field offices around the world. Stunning in its reach, it would entail recasting the upper reaches of the UN Secretariat and exponentially expanding the role of the UNDP itself.

"All hell has broken loose," one senior UN source in New York noted yesterday. "And Speth is probably on his way out as a result of it."

The drama was sparked initially by the Secretary General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who earlier this year sought advice from a wide array of sources on how to set about untangling the widely criticised mess of often overlapping UN agencies, departments, committees and commissions. All told, these employ almost 60,000 UN-employed bureaucrats around the globe.

Mr Boutros-Ghali is expected to offer some initial conclusions on tackling reform in the next few weeks, sources said. He will do so against the background of the pledge made by the United States to veto his reappointment to a second term as Secretary-General at the end of the year on the grounds that he has been insufficiently committed to institutional reform.

The Speth plan, excerpts of which have been leaked, is most notable for calling for a grouping of all the UN's development and humanitarian activities under a single body. That body would essentially be a vastly enhanced UNDP, but would bear a new and more populist name, the UN Alliance for People.

At the Alliance's pinnacle would be one of five newly created senior UN administrators with the title of Deputy Secretary General or Director General. Mr Speth envisages five such Deputies in a newly forged UN Secretariat, each leading a single department. Thus the 10 main departments now contained in the Secretariat would be cut by half. One of the five deputies would act as Secretary General whenever the Secretary General proper is away.

Under the Alliance umbrella would be not only the functions of the UNDP



All change: Boutros Boutros-Ghali, UN Secretary General, will offer some initial conclusions on tackling reform next month. Photograph: FSP/Gamma

but also those of the UN Children's Fund (Unicef), the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs. None of these agencies are thrilled by the idea.

While most observers believe the Speth plan goes beyond anything Mr Boutros-Ghali is likely to propose, it has been welcomed as a breakthrough by some member states.

The US is at the forefront of those de-

manding mould-breaking reform. Washington has circulated a plan of its own that is somewhat milder. It suggests, for instance, the creation of a single Deputy Secretary General who would be in charge of day-to-day running of the UN.

Britain has meanwhile voiced cautious support for the Speth document. "The Speth ideas are among several proposals that are being launched," the British Ambassador to the UN, Sir John Weston, said yesterday. "He knows that we welcome the effort and imagination he

has put into that even if that doesn't mean that we will necessarily support all of what he has to say."

Both the US document and another plan to be submitted next week by the European Union focus not just on changes in the Secretariat, but also on significantly revamping the UN's Economic and Social Committee (Ecosoc), the main policy-setting body for all the UN's economic, development and humanitarian activities. Ecosoc, which is served by a swathe of agencies and commissions, is widely regarded to be drowning in verbiage, duplication and waste.

Common threads in the reports include steps to eliminate some departments and agencies no longer deemed useful. Candidates for termination range from the Vienna-based UN Industrial Development Organisation (Unido) to such zany entities as the Committee on Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. There is also agreement on the need to strengthen the governing body of Ecosoc itself. In countries benefiting from UN programmes, all UN agencies would be located in one premise and a single UN representative would be appointed to take charge.

The EU document, obtained by *The Independent*, states: "We believe that it remains regrettably the case that the impact of many UN programmes and operations in the field is too often undermined by the lack of adequate coordination, overlapping responsibilities and fragmentation of activities."

Mr Boutros-Ghali is empowered to make some of the changes unilaterally, particularly as regards streamlining and staff structures within the Secretariat. The more far-reaching ideas, including most of Mr Speth's, would have to be sold to the wide membership, however, which would be a tough task. The debate would be complicated by widespread suspicion that the principle motive of the US is to cut the UN's budget rather than strengthen its role.

In this regard, Mr Speth takes direct aim at the US. "Some of the reformers most vocal about the need for a rationally organized, better managed and more cost-effective organisation have confronted the organization with severe financial pressures, thus creating the impression that their real agenda may be to diminish the United Nations vis à vis other centres of international leadership or, at best, to reduce the United Nations to a 'boutique'."

The United Nations system

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Main and other subsidiary committees

Standing committees and ad hoc bodies

Other subsidiary organs and related bodies

UNHCR United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

IAEA International Atomic Energy Agency

INSTRAW International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women

UNHCR United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat)

UNCTAD United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

UNICDP United Nations International Drug Control Programme

UNDP United Nations Development Programme

UNEP United Nations Environment Programme

UNFPA United Nations Population Fund

UNHCR Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNICEF United Nations Children's Fund

UNIFEM United Nations Development Fund for Women

UNITAR United Nations Institute for Training and Research

UNU United Nations University

WFP World Food Council

ILO International Labour Organization

FAO Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

WHO World Health Organization

WORLD BANK GROUP

IBRD International Bank for Reconstruction and Development

IDA International Development Association

IFC International Finance Corporation

MIGA Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency

IMF International Monetary Fund

ICAO International Civil Aviation Organization

UPU Universal Postal Union

ITU International Telecommunication Union

WMO World Meteorological Organization

IMO International Maritime Organization

WIPO World Intellectual Property Organization

IFAD International Fund for Agricultural Development

UNIDO United Nations Industrial Development Organization

WTO World Trade Organization

WFP World Food Programme

ITC International Trade Centre

UNCTAD/WTO

FUNCTIONAL COMMISSIONS

• Commission for Social Development

• Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice

• Commission on Human Rights

• Commission on Narcotics

• Commission on Science and Technology for Development

• Commission on Sustainable Development

• Commission on the Status of Women

• Commission on Population and Development

• Statistical Commission

REGIONAL COMMISSIONS

• Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)

• Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)

• Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)

• Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)

• Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

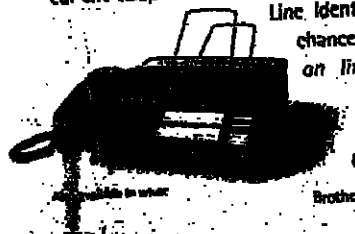
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Norway PM quits amid rumours of top UN job

Tony Barber
Europe Editor

Gro Harlem Brundtland, one of Norway's most distinguished politicians since independence in 1905, took her compatriots by surprise yesterday when she said she would resign tomorrow as Prime Minister. She insisted her decision was purely a matter of domestic politics, but the announcement fuelled speculation that she might be a candidate for the post of United Nations Secretary-General.

Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the incumbent, who is from Egypt, will soon complete his first term, and the United States has made public its desire to see a new person in the job. However, he has indicated he will not go quietly, and a number of countries, including France, have signalled that they would be happy to see him stay in the job.

Mrs Brundtland, 57, Norway's Prime minister for 10 of the past 15 years, would appear to have excel-

lent qualifications for the post of secretary-general. A strong-minded, hard-working champion of women's rights, environmental issues and Third World development, she led a UN commission that produced a study of the world's environment in 1987 which quickly became known as the Brundtland Report.

It was with her approval that Norwegian officials brokered a peace agreement between Israel and the PLO during a series of secret meetings in Norway. As the NTB news agency observed, "her involvement in international affairs has led to her being known in countries that scarcely would have been aware of Norway otherwise".

However, she is no stranger to controversy. She shocked some of her international admirers in 1992 by announcing Norway would resume whale-hunting in defiance of the International Whaling Commission's world-wide ban.

Mrs Brundtland confined herself yesterday to saying: "I feel I have

done a reasonable job for a number of years ... I am in good shape. At 57, one hopes to have many good years to work. I think there are many exciting things I could do."

She told parliament that she had advised Norway's constitutional monarch, King Harald V, to appoint Thorbjørn Jagland, 46, the leader of her own Labour Party, as her successor.

However, she said no one in government or parliament had known about her decision in advance, and she had not even informed Mr Jagland until 10 minutes before her announcement. "We had a little trouble tracking him down. He was out getting a haircut," she said.

Mrs Brundtland became Norway's youngest and first woman prime minister in 1981. Although that spell in office lasted only eight months, she later led two minority Labour governments from 1986 to 1989 and from November 1990 to the present day.

She has been an extraordinarily

popular leader, with opinion polls often recording approval ratings of more than 90 per cent. Her popularity was not even affected by what was probably the worst political defeat of her life, the 1994 referendum in which Norwegians voted not to join the European Union.

Being outside the EU seems not to bother a country whose oil and gas wealth has turned it into one of the richest in the world. While most EU countries are grappling with high unemployment, low growth, excessive budget deficits and welfare systems in urgent need of reform, Norway has a booming economy, relatively few people out of work, a budget surplus, and a generous and sophisticated welfare system.

Mrs Brundtland, who studied public health at Harvard University, was elected to parliament in 1977 and took over the Labour Party leadership in 1981. She resigned that job in 1992 after her son Joergen, one of four children, committed suicide.



Time's up: Gro Harlem Brundtland, with her personal secretary, Oystein Singaas, arriving at the press conference yesterday at which she announced that she was stepping down. Photograph: AFP

Italy faces up to ghosts of Fascist past

Andrew Gumbel
Rome

Embarrassed by the uproar surrounding the trial of former SS captain Erich Priebke, military prosecutors across Italy are digging through old files for the first time in decades and launching investigations into ex-Nazis responsible for war crimes at the end of the Second World War.

In a rush of activity that follows on from nearly 50 years of almost total silence on the subject, military tribunals in Verona, La Spezia, Turin and elsewhere are all looking for possible cases to prosecute. One has already emerged - another former SS captain who ordered the shooting of 15 partisans in Milan in August 1944, at the height of the civil war pitting resistance fighters against Italians loyal to the puppet Fascist republic of Salò.

The shooting became such a symbol of partisan outrage that when Mussolini and his mistress, Clara Petacci, were captured and shot at the end of the war, their bodies were brought to the same site in Piazzale Loreto and hung upside down as a crude gesture of revenge.

Prosecutors in Turin announced this week that they were seeking an indictment against the former captain, who has lived in Germany since the war. They did not name him, but he is believed to be Theodor Sawewke, now in his early eighties, who was stationed with the SS in Milan in 1944.

This renewed interest in prosecuting Nazis, an activity the Italians have not engaged in since 1948, is due almost entirely to the Priebke case - an affair that has highlighted Italy's previous reluctance to come to terms with the darker episodes of its past.

Priebke was extradited from Argentina a year ago after be-

ing "discovered" by a US television crew, and put on trial for his role in the massacre of 335 civilians in the Ardeatine Caves outside Rome in June 1944. The military court that heard his case, however, chose not to send him to jail, on the grounds that he had been under severe pressure to obey orders.

That verdict, which outraged the Italian establishment, was deemed a shoddy piece of justice and eventually quashed on appeal last week. Priebke will now appear in the dock again sometime in mid-December, joined this time by a fellow former SS officer, Karl Hass, who originally appeared at the trial as a witness for the prosecution.

One of the themes to emerge from the first trial was that Italy not only turned its back on war crimes after 1948, the date of the last big military tribunals, but actively sought to bury them. One military prosecutor, Sergio Dini of Padua, has alleged that thousands of cases were deliberately consigned to the archives in the 1950s and 1960s.

The renewed activity looks like a belated attempt to make up for this long period of bad faith. It could prove too hot to handle. By chasing old Nazis, the Italians risk opening a can of worms about the behaviour of their own citizens.

The massacre for which Sawewke is being pursued is a case in point. Although ordered by Kesselring, the supreme German commander in Italy, it was carried out by Italians loyal to Mussolini. If military prosecutors are going to pursue the German officers, then logic dictates they must sooner or later start delving into the cases of surviving Italians. That kind of investigation, with all the national soul-searching that it implies, may be more than Italy is prepared to countenance.

Portillo warns of war threat

Christopher Bellamy
Defence Correspondent

Nato must remain prepared to fight "high-intensity conflicts" that may be "short and sharp", and not necessarily distant from western Europe, or with the low levels of casualties that have characterised recent operations in the Gulf and Bosnia, Britain's Secretary of State for Defence, Michael Portillo, said yesterday.

Latest intelligence assessments list 53 potential crisis points, including the Balkans, Transcaucasia, Algeria, Libya and Iraq. Of those, 17 lay within 200 miles of Nato's borders. He also said that it should in future be "the norm for Nato to consult Russia on changes in which it could have an interest".

Mr Portillo's speech to the Royal Institute for International Affairs in Brussels - entitled "European security, Nato and 'hard' defence" - was designed to stress that although recent military operations have been distant and relatively free of casualties, they are not "reliable models for all likely future operations". "This is not the time for Nato to go soft, and certainly not to convert itself into an organisation mainly capable

of peacekeeping operations", Mr Portillo said.

He focused on what he called "hard defence" - intense, though possibly brief operations in which there would be no time to learn. "There will be no opportunity for us to generate conscript reserves or to manufacture new weaponry ... We must plan on the basis that what you start with is all you'll get."

The speech - probably the most significant Mr Portillo has made on the character of future conflict and international security - was made in the context of imminent Nato expansion, and was designed to stress the importance of Nato as the link between a greater European defence identity and the US.

Outside Nato there are about 35 countries equipped with up-to-date tanks and artillery; 40 have modern offensive aircraft; 30 have modern submarine forces; 20 possess ballistic missiles and some Nato territory is within range of missiles fired from the Middle East.

"The likelihood of conflict is, if anything, increasing", Mr Portillo said. "For, as the risk of global catastrophe has reduced, the risk of geographically limited conflict has increased."





Adrian Bridge
Budapest

In twos and threes the groups of mainly elderly mourners walked among the tombstones and laid their floral tributes. The largest bouquets were reserved for Imre Nagy, the reforming Communist who came to embody the 1956 Hungarian National Uprising and who paid for it with his life.

Fejes Maria Szentene recalled the heady days 40 years ago when thousands of Hungarians took to the streets to rid the country of Soviet rule. "I was only 10 but it was a great thing to be alive at that time," she said. "As a nation we were united, all fighting together for

Hungarians honour heroes of 1956 revolt

freedom and independence. Every year I like to come here to remember that." In addition to Nagy, an estimated 400 people were sentenced to death in the clampdown that followed the crushing of the uprising by Soviet tanks.

For years their bodies lay in an unmarked grave in Plot 301 of Budapest's Ujpest cemetery. Deliberately unattended and concealed, the graves had an unwelcome air of soldiers standing guard to deter unwanted mourners. With the demise of Communism in 1989, the graveyard was spruced up and the victims of the uprising reburied in their own plots. As Hungarians collectively paused yesterday to reflect on the anniversary of the start of the uprising, a steady flow of people came to pay their respects.

For Gyorgy Bekesi, it was harrowing: his father, Bela, was one of those executed. One of his only recollections of his father is, as a three-year-old, visiting him in prison and sitting on his lap shortly before he was hanged. "I knew very little of my father but at least I know that he died for what he believed in," said Mr Bekesi. "Of course, it was a great shame that the uprising had such a tragic outcome

but, 40 years on, everyone can see that its cause was just."

The leaders of the uprising also announced that Hungary would withdraw from the Warsaw Pact alliance and hold free and fair elections.

At a ceremony marking yesterday's anniversary, President Arpad Goncz, who was jailed for several years for his role in the uprising, said that although the occasion belonged to those who participated, it was time to hand the "flame of freedom" to the younger generation.

But the ceremonies were also marked by bitterness over the fact that none of the Hungarians responsible for suppressing the uprising have subsequently had to face trial and that the contents of the files detailing what everybody did remain secret.

Many commemorating the anniversary were irked by the fact that 40 years ago Gyula Horn, the present Socialist Prime Minister, was in a pro-Moscow militia unit that helped put down the rebellion. "We may be able to come and mourn our dead freely now, but we can hardly talk of justice having been done yet," said Mr Bekesi. "The heirs of the murderers are still among us."

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US rearms Muslims in Bosnia

Christopher Bellamy
Defence Correspondent

A massive arms shipment for the Muslim-Croat Federation forces in Bosnia will arrive at the Adriatic port of Ploce tomorrow. The shipment is part of the United States' "train-and-equip" programme and is the first overt shipment of heavy weaponry to one of the former warring factions in Bosnia since the start of the three-and-a-half-year civil war in 1992. It comprises 45 tanks, 79 armoured personnel carriers (APCs), 15 helicopters, ammunition and communications equipment.

An initial shipment of 1,000 M-16 rifles and ammunition arrived last August: the heavy equipment forms the bulk of the \$100m (£63m) deal.

It is expected that the federation will have to scrap some old military equipment in order to remain within the weapons ceilings laid down in last year's Dayton peace agreement. None of the US equipment is at the cutting edge of military technology, but it is substantially better than anything the federation had available in the war.

Although the US is also providing troops for the Nato-led international peace implementation force (I-For) in Bosnia, the arm-and-train mission, run by ex-US officers under the auspices of a private firm, MPRI (Military Professional Resources, Inc.), is being kept quite separate.

I-For officers are uneasy about arm-and-train, which they find potentially embarrassing as it is taking place in parallel with

efforts to maintain the peace. In the summer, the Bosnian Serbs accused I-For of helping supply federation forces with armoured vehicles and missiles. An I-For spokesman said, "the only thing we care about is if they start moving them around".

During the war, the Muslims and Croats – sometimes fighting the Serbs, sometimes each other – were heavily out-gunned by the Bosnian Serb army. The Muslims managed to repair some weapons, build simple mortars and probably received some supplies covertly from Iran. The Dayton peace agreement laid down ceilings for armaments in the former Yugoslavia. Within Bosnia, the Muslim-Croat Federation is allowed twice as many weapons in the key categories of tanks, artillery, APCs, helicopters and aircraft as the Bosnian Serbs.

MPRI, based in Alexandria, Virginia, took two months to set up its operation, based in the Holiday Inn in Sarajevo. This month, it began training troops from the Bosnian government army and the Bosnian Croat militia (the HVO), at a military academy near Sarajevo. The company is concentrating on training officers and senior NCOs who have experience from the war and will form the core of the future federation army's officer corps. But they have also started field training for two Bosnian Army "brigades".

An MPRI spokesman said that the shipment of equipment would be transferred by road from Ploce, in Croatia, to depots in Bosnia.

Poll rulings back far right

Mary Dejevsky
Paris

The extreme-right National Front was unfairly beaten in a hotly contested city council election last year, France's supreme judicial authority has ruled, and the election is to be re-run. The Council of State found that the winning candidate in Dreux, an ailing industrial town west of Paris, breached electoral rules on combining professional and political activity.

All the councillors of the centre-right majority resigned yesterday on learning of the judgment against their mayor, Gerard Hamel, a Gaullist, precipitating new elections. A similar judgment is believed to be imminent in the case of Vitrolles, north of Marseille, where the incumbent mayor defeated a National Front candidate in the second round of

the election, but is now accused of exceeding campaign spending limits.

In both towns the National Front easily topped the poll in the first round, but lost the second round after two weeks of frantic attention from mainstream parties, which staffed expensive centrally-located campaign centres and rushed in floods of posters and literature.

Both they and the media treated the towns as bellwethers of French opinion that could not be "lost". In the event three cities, Orange, Marignane and Toulon – which had not been subject to this treatment – fell to the National Front.

In Dreux, the National Front candidate, Marie-France Stirbois, is now back on the campaign stump, and the Front's leaders are basking in what they call the "degeneracy" of the country's political establishment.

China's revolutionary spit and polish



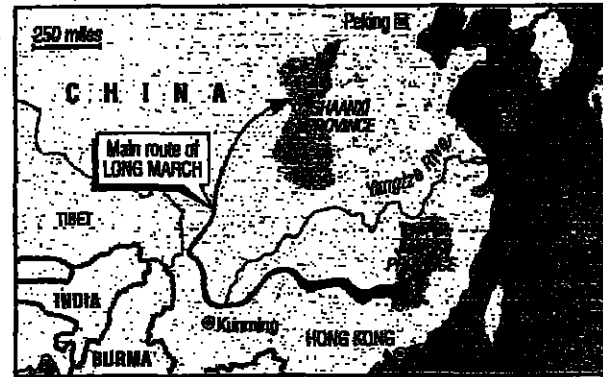
March of time: Children rehearse for the anniversary of the Red Army's long journey to Yanan Photograph: Teresa Poole

The town at the end of the Long March puts an anniversary shine on its memories. **Teresa Poole** reports from Yanan

Revolutionary Yanan never looked this smart in the Great Helmsman's day. But now, as China celebrates the 60th anniversary of the end of the Long March, the guardians of Communist mythology have called in the decorators.

Painters and plasterers are working against the clock to spruce up the former homes used by Chairman Mao Tse-tung. Roofs are being repaired, flagstones laid, gardens replanted and access roads built, in preparation for the senior leaders who might pass through in the coming months.

The Red Army's 6,000-mile retreat from the right-wing forces of the Chinese Kuomintang (KMT) Nationalists is the stuff of Communist legend. Under constant attack, Mao and his followers crossed mountain ranges and wide rivers as they tramped from Jiangxi, in south-east China, to Yanan in the desolate north-western Shaanxi province. Yanan provided a key base for the Chinese Communists and the Red Army throughout the turbulent era from the Long March, which began in 1934, until the Communist victory in 1948.



The 10 per cent of the Red Army which survived the Long March had quickly discovered that Yanan provided an ideal base. What began in October 1934 as a last-ditch retreat from the KMT had become a tactical victory.

The area is now the official "sacred place" of Chinese revolutionary history. And with China's leaders focused on the need to fill an ideological and spiritual vacuum, invoking old revolutionary values of a bygone era is a good bet.

For the past week, the media has marked the anniversary with a daily supply of Red Army veterans. They are often seen

being congratulated by President Jiang Zemin, who is thankful for every event which features him as the natural heir to Chairman Mao, and is taking centre stage for this jamboree.

In Peking, the Military Museum is running an exhibition: "The Long March, A Monument Forever". A Long March film is also finishing production, and Tuesday's prime-time television show was *Long March - The Heroic Epic*, featuring Mao's only grandson, better known to most Chinese for his expansive girth than for his acting.

Let anyone doubt that the anniversary is a political tool, there is the question of timing. The Long March is normally recorded as starting in October 1934 and ending in October 1935. But a celebration last year would have fallen close to the World Women's Conference in Peking, so the official 60th anniversary was moved to October 1936, when the different packs of Red Army soldiers finally regrouped in Yanan.

For the oldest Yanan residents, the anniversary preparations have stirred dusty memories. Wang Ruzhen, who joined the Red Army in 1934, is 91. In the corner of the sitting room sits his coffin, a gift from his 70-year-old daughter. Mr Wang remembers when the Long Marchers arrived in October 1935. "They were all in grey clothes, but not ragged," he said. The next year, Mao visited Mr Wang's town in the Yanan countryside. "But because Mao spoke with a strong southern accent, I did not understand very much."

Renovations are under way at all the historic sites in the town. At Wangjiaping, the site of an old army headquarters, more than 60 labourers are toiling away, though they seemed unimpressed by the task. Zhang Feiyong, 34, said: "Before I came here, I cooked in a middle school." Was this a better

job? "No. And this job is not hard. If some other work comes up, I will go to that."

The marchers' "cave dwellings", the old revolutionary homes, are in fact in the style of traditional Shaanxi arched rooms, built into the side of the hills like a row of terraced houses. After a bit of paint, the hardships of revolutionary life are swiftly sanitised, to the dismay of one local official. "They didn't have white paint and brick on the ground. I don't think [the renovation] is a good idea. It is too good. We should keep it as it was," he said.

In one corner of Wangjiaping remains a hotel that has been spared the workmen's attention. This is the unmarked former home of Liu Biao, revolutionary hero-turned-traitor whose corpulent figure was thwarted in 1971. He has been written out of the anniversary script.

Another bit of revolutionary tidying up may be necessary at the monument in the "Dated Garden" where Mao made his famous "Serve the People" speech, but where the locals have since set up basketball posts.

Outside the town's museum will be the anniversary's *pièce de résistance*. A huge square has been levelled and a plinth erected in anticipation of the arrival of a large bronze statue of Mao. Strangely, this will be the first Mao statue in "sacred" Yanan. Zhuo Youcai, the general secretary of the Yanan District Administrative Department, said: "We had the idea [for a statue] during the Cultural Revolution, but it did not get approved. After that we did not apply for permission."

There were no events at all to mark the 50th anniversary of the Long March a decade ago. "According to Chinese customs, 60 is more important than 50," mumbled Mr Zhuo.

The truth is that, until recently, Yanan was too poor for such diversions. A good revolutionary base in the mountains does not always make a base for economic reform.

The cost of the Mao statue has mostly been raised through public "donations", like that of Liang Zhibing, a 74-year-old former Red Army soldier, who gave a whole month's pension. And, on the side of his apartment building, is a large red poster to help the fund-raising - naming all the residents and listing the amount of their individual donations.

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HK probes resignation 'cover up'

Stephen Vines
Hong Kong

While Hong Kong's Governor Chris Patten is in London for talks, the credibility of his administration back home could be severely damaged after legislators yesterday took the unusual step of launching an inquiry into the sudden departure of Lawrence Leung, the head of the colony's immigration department.

This is particularly embarrassing for the Governor because he has spearheaded the government's campaign to persuade the public that Mr Leung took early retirement for "purely personal reasons". Yesterday the legislator Selina Chow said the government appeared to be engaged in a cover up. She used parliamentary privilege to cite allegations about Mr Leung made in a newspaper report. These stated he had been secretly passing information to the Chinese government on Chinese dissidents, and disclosing highly secret details of who had been given British passports under the British nationality scheme.

The allegations were described as "fanciful speculation" by WK Lam, the Secretary for the Civil Service. Mr Leung has previously denied allegations of wrongdoing but has now disappeared from sight. Last July he cleared his office in 24 hours after taking early retirement on a full pension. The normal practice is that senior civil servants give 12 months' notice.

However, on the eve of his departure for London Mr Patten repeated that Mr Leung had "left public service for personal reasons" and stated that his successor was an "excellent" replacement. Asked whether he would describe Mr Leung as "excellent", Mr Patten tartly replied: "I would say he worked



Patten faces embarrassment over official's departure

for many years for the Hong Kong Government."

Meanwhile it emerged that Canada expressed concerns over Mr Leung's activity as head of the immigration service. Canada's worries appear to be related to the background of immigrants coming to Canada via Hong Kong. And, as long as three years ago the Government was alerted to problems in the immigration department, which appeared to be unilaterally deciding to increase the quota for immigrants from China. In 1992, legal immigration from China totalled 28,400 people, and last year it peaked at 45,000.

The situation surrounding Mr Leung is complicated by the fact that he flaunted his good relations with China. Indeed his retirement was quickly followed by expressions of regret from Chinese officials, and an attempt by Peking to raise its concern during Sino-British talks.

This is only the second time that a committee has been established to examine the departure of a senior civil servant. The first was more than three years ago when Alex Tsui, an officer in the Independent Commission Against Corruption, was forced to leave because of his association with known criminals.

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Democrats take off in battle for Congress

Rupert Cornwell
Washington

The US Presidential race of 1996 may be about as tepid a contest as a Mike Tyson come-back fight. But the battle for Congress, which the Republicans recaptured two years ago for the first time since the Eisenhower era, has turned into one of the most complex, fast-moving and unpredictable ever.

The question is simply put: Can the Democrats make the net gain of three that, with the break vote of Vice President Al Gore, would suffice to give them a majority in the Senate, and the net gain of 19 in the House of Representatives that would end Newt Gingrich's two years as Speaker? Right now, however, not even the most brazen of political analysts will venture an answer.

A fortnight ago I would have given both chambers to the Democrats, but now I'm not so sure," said Charles Cook, author of the respected Cook Report. "It's going to be a fun night on November 5."

And even then it might not be over. If things are really close,

THE US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS '96

theorised, are reluctant to entrust too much power to a single party, and prefer divided government. Hence the emergence in the closing stages of the campaign of the "blank cheque" argument.

There was something close to a public acknowledgement that Mr Dole is doomed from the Republican party chairman, Haley Barbour, this week. Should President Clinton be re-elected, he declared, "then the last thing the American people want is for him to have a blank cheque in the form of a liberal Democratic Congress".

And on the campaign trail, Mr Clinton himself makes the same point by omission. He may be cruising to victory, and the polls increasingly suggest a Democratic edge in the generic vote for the 435 House seats nationwide - but he knows full well his own recovery largely reflected public fear of Republican excesses on Capitol Hill. Never

Democratic chances are probably higher in the House than the Senate, where contests traditionally are less influenced by trends in Presidential politics. Of the 34 Senate seats at stake this time, perhaps 10 are still wide open.

To regain control, the Democrats must win eight of these - meaning that sitting Senator John Kerry must defeat his Republican challenger, Governor William Weld, in the blue band contest in Massachusetts, and, almost certainly, that Harvey Gantt topples arch-conservative Jesse Helms in North Carolina.

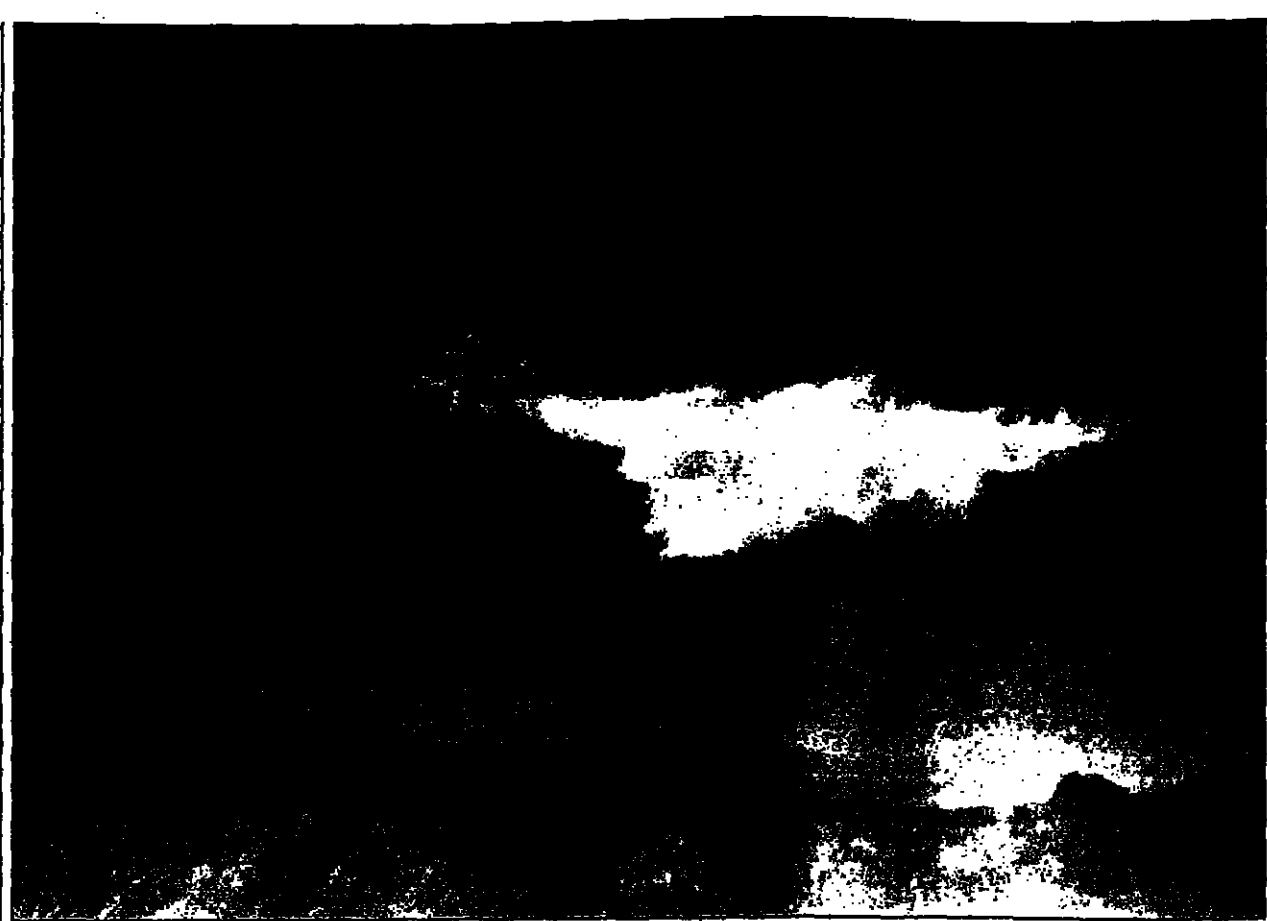
In the House, however, different factors are at play, most tending to aid the Democrats. They include the national unpopularity of Mr Gingrich and many of his ideological followers first elected in 1994, and the possibility of the Republicans ceding some of their recent

gains in the South. In the House too, a successful President's "coat-tails" usually have more effect.

However, there is no guarantee. Every sign is that the public is more than happy at the way Congress has functioned these past few months - how a Clinton sobered by the defeat of 1994, and Republicans chastened by their miscalculation in shutting down the government a year ago, have combined to overhaul welfare and produce a small but popular measure of health-care reform.

But turnout, which could again drop below 50 per cent, may be the key.

In the past, low turnouts have helped Republicans. But scant public interest in the campaign, Mr Dole's anemic performance and his dismal poll showings, could discourage some of his supporters from voting at all.



Dousing: A Super Scooper flies over a smoke-obscured ridge as it drops 1,400lbs of water on a hotspot in Malibu, California, yesterday, where wildfires had raged over several thousand acres, destroying several homes. Photograph: Reuters

	Rep	Dem	Rep	Dem
102nd Congress 1991-93	44	56	197	233
103rd Congress 1993-95	49	51	176	259
104th Congress 1995-97	59	41	226	209

the outcome in the House could be decided by run-off elections in December in a dozen Congressional districts in Texas, where primaries that should have been held earlier in the year were held up by a court row over redistricting.

Paradoxically, higher Republican hopes of retaining control of Congress stem from the very decline of Mr Dole. Americans, it is widely and plausibly

does the President explicitly ask for a Democratic Congress to go with a Democratic White House.

Increasingly, he is shifting his public appearances to districts and states where a Democratic candidate for House or Senate is in a close fight. But only indirectly will he make the pitch, warning against complacency and urging voters to turn out at the polls on election day.

significant shorts

Slovaks brush aside concerns over Nato

The Slovak parliament brushed aside worries about the country's relationship with Nato and the European Union by approving the first of several controversial laws. Deputies of the three-party coalition approved a law giving the public prosecutor's office unprecedented supervisory and executive powers which even President Michal Kovac has rejected. Yesterday's vote was taken a day after the US and EU ambassadors indicated Slovakia must improve its record on democratic reform and commitment to the rule of law if it wants to join the EU and Nato. *Reuters - Bratislava*

Belgian king speaks out

King Albert of Belgium called for international co-operation to stamp out the kind of exploitation of children and trade in humans seen in his country's paedophile scandal. In a speech at a banquet in his honour in Japan last night, the king said Belgium and Japan must "act resolutely against these two terrible moral plagues", and added that "efficient co-operation between nations [is] urgently needed." The king and Queen Donna Paola arrived in Japan on Monday for a five-day state visit. *Reuters - Tokyo*

Farmers' rally turns sour

A mass rally in the Swiss capital to protest declining living standards for farmers ended in chaos when police turned on demonstrators with rubber bullets, water cannon and tear gas. More than 10,000 people, including women and children, took part in the demonstration in Bern. The Swiss Farmers Union director, Melchior Ehrler, described the police action as "completely irresponsible". *AP - Bern*

Mitterrand's doctor to pay damages

A court ordered Francois Mitterrand's doctor to pay 340,000 francs (£44,000) in damages to the late French President's relatives, and upheld a ban on the book disclosing details of his fatal cancer.

Dr Claude Gubler had already been sentenced to a four-month suspended sentence for breaching medical secrecy by revealing in *Le Grand Secret* (The Big Secret) that Mitterrand had allegedly misled the French people for over a decade about the cancer which killed him. *Reuters - Paris*

Egypt bans newspapers

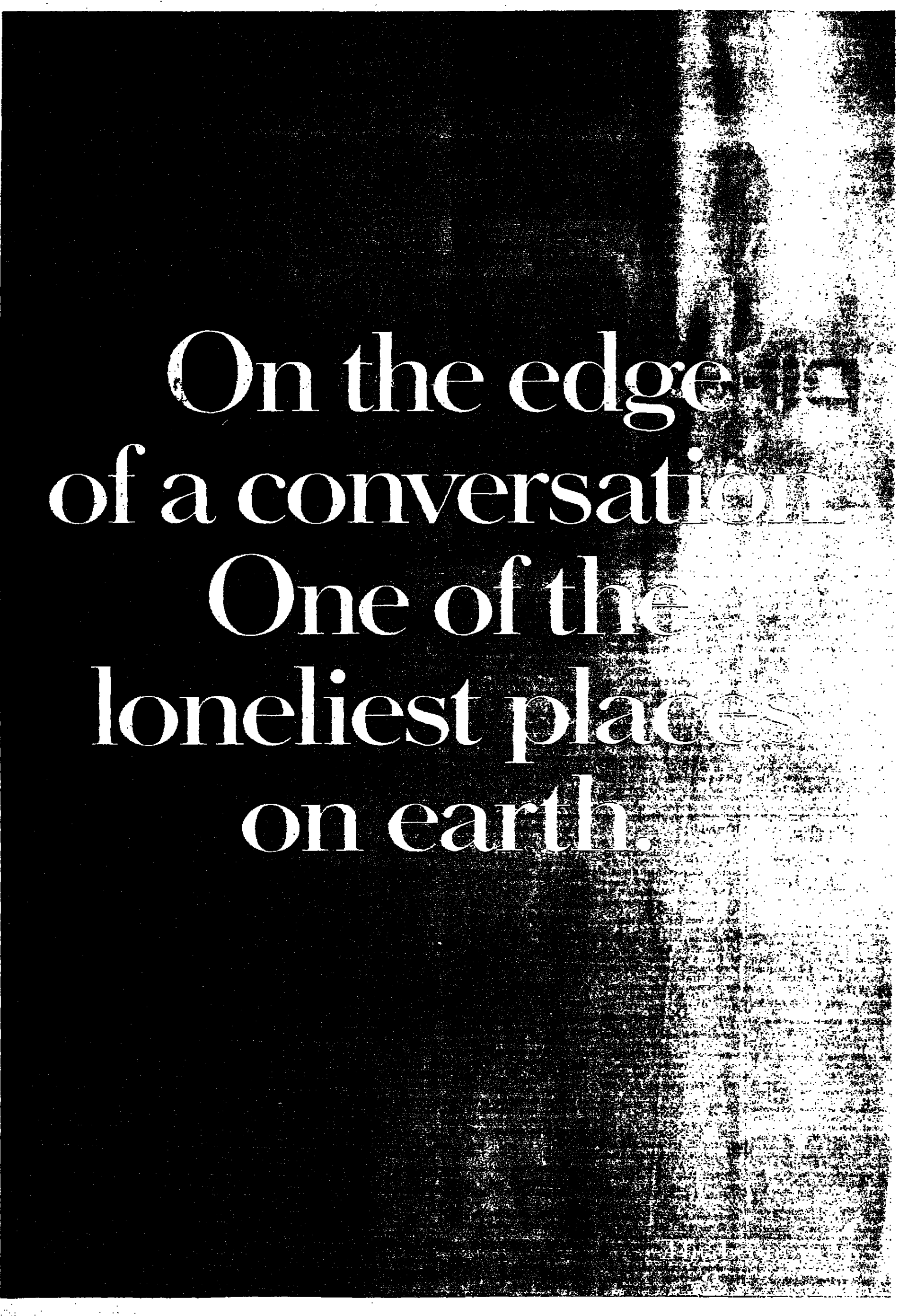
Egypt has banned the distribution of two weekly newspapers because of material rejected by censors, their chief editors said.

Michael Howard, editor at the English-language weekly *The Middle East Times*, said the censors stopped the distribution of the paper because it failed to remove the front-page teaser to an article which it had already withdrawn, which analysed 15 years of rule by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

The ban at the Arabic weekly *al-Dustour* came just 10 days after the Israeli sent [the Foreign Minister] a letter objecting to a picture we ran of [the Israeli Prime Minister] Netanyahu with a Nazi swastika on his forehead," editor Ibrahim Issa said. *Reuters - Cairo*

Kedah makes clean flush of it

Malaysia's Kedah state wants to have the cleanest public toilets in the country. Kedah's Chief Minister, Sanusi Junid, announced his government will dedicate November to cleaning toilets in schools, restaurants, coffee shops, hospitals, offices and bus stations. Broken toilets will also be fixed as part of the "Toilet Cleaning Month". *AP - Kuala Lumpur*



On the edge
of a conversation.
One of the
loneliest places
on earth.

Scare-mongering contests get us nowhere

Yesterday the Queen spoke and the nation yawned; it had been rather well briefed in advance. The announcement of the Government's legislative programme for the next six months was widely heralded as a bout of political point-scoring for the next few months, rather than as a serious law-making agenda for the country.

The trouble is that the pre-election party politicking and the serious business of law-making are inescapably linked. And given the direction in which the politics is heading as the parties compete for votes, the implications for our laws and public policy are rather troubling.

Take a step back for a moment from the political arguments and adopt what we might call the Martian pose. Suppose we had been beamed down for the first time in Britain yesterday. Suppose the content of yesterday's speech had been our first encounter with the contemporary social agenda. What would we have made of it all?

We would probably have twisted round in a panic, fearing for our immediate safety. Consider the Government's suggested legislation. The 13 proposed bills include a Crime Bill, a Police Bill, a Firearms Bill, a Fraud Bill, a Weapons Decommissioning Bill, and a Crime and Punishment Bill for Scotland. It sounds like an emergency programme for a state plagued by serious social disorder and lapped by anarchy.

New measures include more mandatory sentences for criminals, less parole and early release for prisoners, a new National Crime Squad, minimum sentences for drug dealers, crackdowns on benefit fraudsters, tougher controls on guns and disruptive children. It sounds a tough, even hysterically tough, agenda. This Britain is clearly in deep trouble.

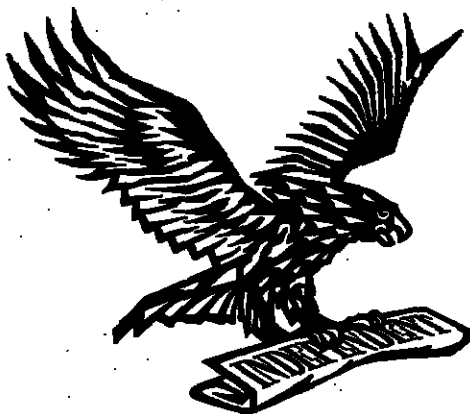
And indeed, some of the reaction of the opposition parties would confirm it. Labour and Liberal Democrat politicians believe the Firearms Bill doesn't go far enough: more guns should be banned. And they are appalled that the Government originally intended to leave to backbenchers proposed new legislation clamping down on suspected paedophiles and stalkers.

Listening to the Government and opposition, there seems little question about it: the British social fabric is crumbling, and coercive measures are needed to patch it back together. All the parties seem to be trying to convince us that the big problem in Britain has been decades of sloppy liberal governments allowing standards of law and order slip, indulging criminals and layabouts alike.

But this is complete nonsense. British society is not faced with a crisis of order. And soft government is not the prime cause of any ills in the social fabric that may be emerging. Moreover the idea that the Conservatives, after 17 years in power, can claim to be the

tough guys sweeping in at the last minute to save us from years of problems created by liberals is just laughable. If the troubles are that serious, they should take some of the blame for not tackling them years ago.

There are genuine social problems that we are right to be concerned about - including high rates of violent crime by teenagers from dysfunctional families living in areas characterised by poor education and high youth unemployment. But to slam down the lid is only half an agenda; many of the measures needed to grapple with crime and disorder are slow-burning. Alongside the



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offenders. And though Labour has policies on youth unemployment to its credit, there was little evidence of them yesterday. They and the Liberal Democrats would rather not be caught in public discussing the missing, expensive and essential part of the agenda.

All the political parties have clearly decided that there are votes to be won - or at least swing votes to be won - on this tough penal agenda. Clearly they believe that they can bid for public support with tougher and tougher criminal measures, blandly ignoring the deeper problems. That in itself is saddening. Unless the politicians are mistaken, it reflects badly on all of us.

But, even worse, there are no limits to this penal auction, no political checks and balances to stop it going too far. Because Labour has long been thought by the public to be weak on crime, the party is determined not to be caught out. As a result, no matter how far Michael Howard moves to the right, Labour seems destined to follow.

If this were simply a matter of political game-playing, charades and shadow-boxing carried out in advance of an election, it wouldn't be so bad. But these are proposed laws, not arguments, and even once the election is past, the new government, whatever its complexion, will have to live with the promises it has made, and the expectations it has raised in this competition to be tough on crime.

There are many individual proposals we agree with. What really worries us is what wasn't in the speech, and wasn't featured strongly in the debate which followed it. We are living in a relatively orderly and advanced society, well able to deal with its deeper problems if it chooses to. But this exhibition of competitive scare-mongering didn't make us certain of our leaders' determination to grapple with those problems. It was, as ever, a glittering and solemn occasion. But it wasn't an entirely grown-up one.

Peace offering of the paper tiger?

The bad news is that fun-loving Rupert Murdoch, 65, is raising £1.5bn in the US, mortgaging a chunk of BSkyB holding for some purpose. The word on the street is that it has something to do with American digital television. We know the real reason. Rupe has finally realised that despite all the money he ploughs in, he cannot help himself making rubbishy newspapers. So, in a peace offering, he has offered this sum to *The Independent*, in order that we may print on fine velum-quality paper, recruit many more journalists, and so on. The good news, of course, is that we regard it as tainted money and will have nothing to do with it.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Shooters the scapegoats for Dunblane

Sir: Given the Government's response to the Cullen report I am still having some difficulty understanding why I and fellow legitimate pistol shooters are being punished for a horrendous crime committed by a Scottish madman, whose actions and tendencies were well known to the local police, but were negligently ignored.

Having never considered myself a latent psychopath, I still subscribe to the belief that the current law with minor amendments and if properly applied should be sufficient. We now have the Labour Party trying to outgun the Government by calling for a ban on all privately owned pistols.

These positions are apparently as a response to "overwhelming" public opinion. Pistol shooters, at around 57,000, are a small number to scapegoat, with insignificant voting power. With a ban in place, the public gets an illusion of security with no loss on their part since they have no connection with the sport. Any excuse will next be used to tighten up further on ownership of rifles and shotguns. This will continue while there is an automatic but false association of firearms and violence in the public mind.

Dr IAN STRAWBRIDGE
Sheffield

Sir: As daughter of a firearms dealer, I am suffering already from the proposals to ban handguns. As soon as the ban comes into force, my father will lose his business. He has been in business for 16 years and is over 50. How can he get another job? Compensation is essential, as many people's livelihoods will be snatched away.

We stand to lose everything, including our house. My sister, who has recently passed three A-levels, can no longer go to university. I will not be able to achieve my ambition of becoming a performer, as the tuition is out of our price range now that my father will be out of a job. I am in my first year of A-levels (aged 16) and feel my future has gone.

I feel for the people who are linked in any way to the Dunblane massacre, but it is not time someone felt for us and our families? We have done nothing wrong.

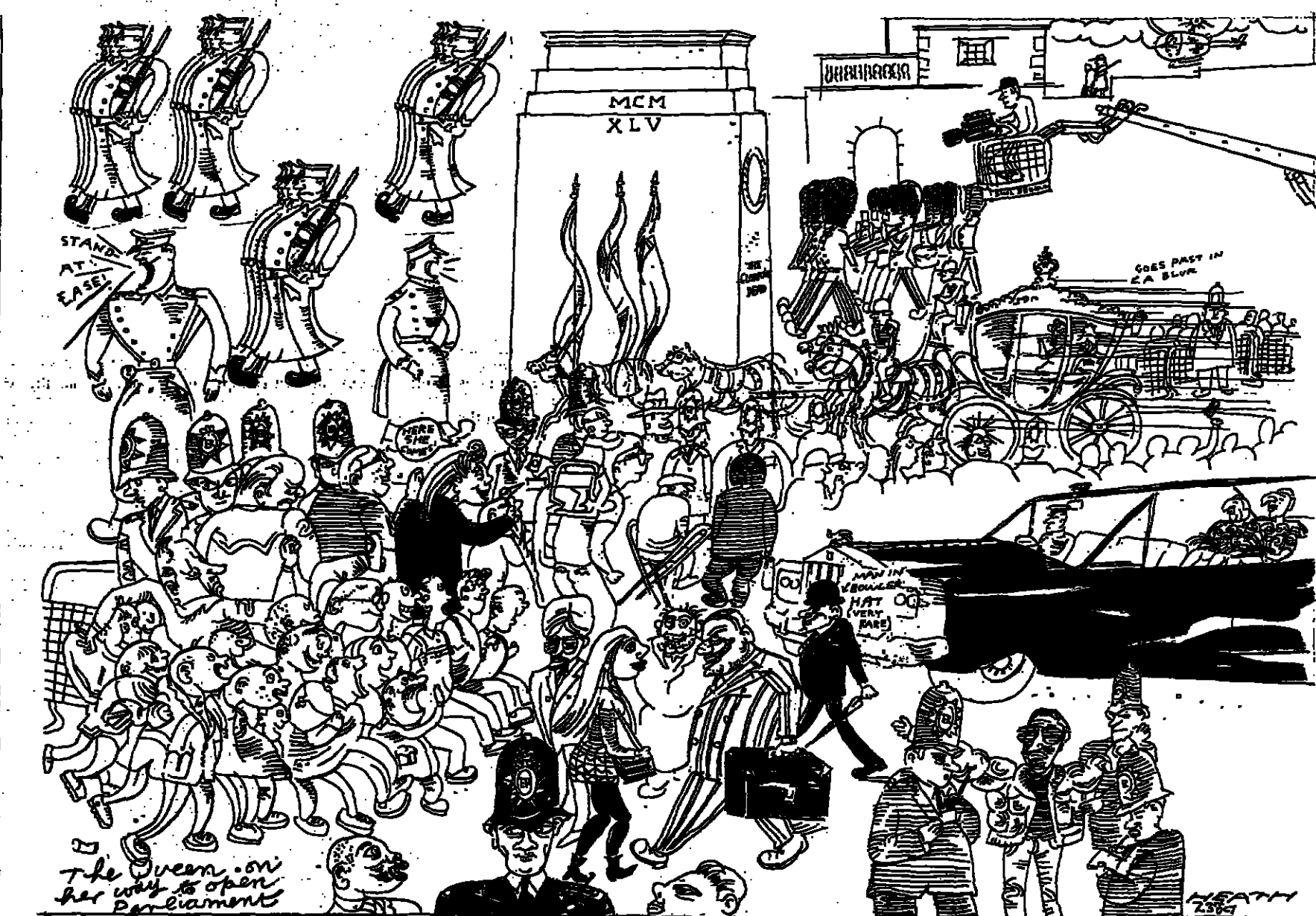
CLOVER BROWN
Prestwood, Buckinghamshire

Sir: On 5 September 1914, a few weeks after the commencement of the Great War, the light cruiser HMS *Pathfinder* was torpedoed off the Firth of Forth by the German submarine U21. The ship sank very quickly and 270 of her crew perished.

One of those was Henry Ernest Morrison, a commissioned gunner. During his early service, Mr Morrison, in common with many army and naval officers, purchased his own sidearm. In his case a model 1896 Mauser pistol, identical to that purchased by a young officer called Winston Churchill. It was at that time a novel and advanced design. It is of course cumbersome by modern standards, being a century old.

Mr Morrison's pistol did not go down with HMS *Pathfinder*, and is now in my possession. It is in museum condition. It has been preserved in this state for over 80 years by private persons, who saw themselves, as I do, as a trustee of a valuable and poignant heritage item.

Mr Morrison has no grave - he went down with his ship. His only memorial is his name on the Chatham Naval Memorial and the



Michael Heath's Britain: Queen goes down Whitehall

pistol, with his name on, in my possession. There are many such items in private ownership, and you may imagine my dismay when I heard that the intention was their destruction.

German citizens are now avid collectors of pistols from the Imperial era. It would be ironic indeed if the only way to prevent the destruction of Mr Morrison's pistol were by its export to the country which caused his death.

R FLEARNY
Carnalston Beaches, Surrey

Sir: "Handgun" is an American word used in England by politicians who have no knowledge of the subject. What Thomas Hamilton used is a "combat weapon" designed to blow enemies to pieces. It is a low-skill instrument held in some contempt by Olympic shooters. It must be banned.

The "Olympic pistol" is not "lethal" (letter, 19 October) except in so far as a car, a baseball bat, a crossbow can be lethal. It is a variant of the .22 target pistol. It is designed to punch a tiny hole in cardboard when fired with deliberate steady aim at a stationary target. It fires five shots only.

It is quite grotesque to say that it could be used for another Dunblane. The momentum of the missile is a very small fraction of that of the bullets fired by Hamilton. The victim is exceptionally unfortunate, it will not kill. Olympic shooters concede that an expert might just manage to kill one person with it but you or I would certainly fail.

I never shoot, but feel strongly that this harmless Olympic sport should continue.

DEREK J COLE
St Leonards, East Sussex

Sir: I have seen several letters to newspapers claiming that the design of pistol targets is based on the human figure. "Humanoid" targets are used in only two pistol disciplines widely shot in the UK. One is shot on the Police Athletic Association target and the other on the standard British Army Figure 59/11. All other targets, for both fullbore and smallbore pistols, are of the "round black blob" variety.

A scoring ring on a piece of paper is exactly that, irrespective of the pattern surrounding it. Turning a gun on a human being calls for an entirely different psychological stance - which is why only the deranged or those specifically trained to the task actually do it.

PETER BROOKESMITH
Kensington Rifle and Pistol Club London W14

Sir: Jack Boteler (letter, 22 October) writes from Texas, but we live on this very crowded island. We have a police force we can call on immediately with a phone call.

In California six years ago when I suggested that we hooted at another car, my cousin pointed out that they might have a gun.

Nearly I walked along a smart avenue and saw signs saying "Armed Response" in each garden with the insignia of this or that security firm.

Driving and walking - two freedoms which we take for granted but which are constrained by the possession of arms.

NICK LANDAU
London SW16

Teachers turned into victims

Sir: We are horrified by the discussion over events at Ridings School ("Battle to ban 60 children from one school", 22 October). It is turning teachers into victims.

As teachers and parents ourselves we can fully empathise with the tiring efforts required to deal with unruly and rude children. However we cannot understand the elevation of these little horrors into gargantuan monsters. Children are not becoming more violent, nor are they committing more crime. In 1996 there were 299 fewer convictions of under-21s than in 1981. Children have not become more beastly. Rather, stressed and hardworking teachers are being encouraged to blame children for their plight. Grow up and look at the real problems facing teachers!

TIFANY JENKINS
BERNADETTE WHELAN
Families for Freedom London N5

Fear of Germany drives EU too

Sir: Donald Macintyre's article (22 October) on the Eurosceptics' fear of Germany is long overdue. Unfortunately, he omits to emphasise how the entire European project is driven by a like fear, and by France's in particular. Our perspective is that of a wartime victor whereas France's is that of the vanquished.

Post letters to Letters to the Editor, and include a daytime telephone number. Fax: 0171-293 2056; e-mail: letters@independent.co.uk. E-mail correspondents are asked to give a postal address. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

France understands only too well the need to grasp a historic opportunity and react positively to Germany's remarkable - and fleeting? - readiness to give up some of its sovereignty and be bound into some kind of federated Europe. For France, and perhaps for the rest of continental Europe, the probable problems and costs of EMU pale into insignificance beside the possible costs of Germany - and European nation-states in general - unbound.

R A RICHARDSON
London SE7

Sir: Were I Mr Eddie George ("The danger of blocking exchange safety valve", 21 October) I should be far more worried about the rate of interest needed to prevent a free-fall in sterling were Britain not in the first wave of monetary union and left to compete with the newest and strongest currency in the world. If he is worried about unemployment he should worry about a doubling or tripling of the premium on British corporate bonds which has prevented any expansion in our industrial investment.

Sir FRED CATHIERWOOD
Balsham, Cambridgeshire

Aid debate

Sir: Jonathon Porritt ("Nothing in life is free", 21 October) rightly points out the Liberal Democrats' understanding that environmental and economic policies must be integrated if we are to take caring for the environment seriously. However, it is not true that aid,

international development and Third World debt were banished from our conference agenda. At Brighton this year we launched our aid paper *A World of Opportunity*, which was developed in discussion with NGOs and has widespread support among aid organisations.

We had a long debate, with delegates giving their approval to our policy to reach the UN's target of 0.7 per cent of GNP over 10 years, making the Liberal Democrats the only party committed to reaching the target.

RUPERT REDESDALE
(Lord Redesdale)
Liberal Democrat Overseas Aid Spokesperson
House of Lords London SW1

Drama at BBC

Sir: Good luck to Nick Elliott in his endeavours to camouflage the fact that ITV is relying on a dwindling number of bankers in its drama line-up (Media, 22 October). However, when he claims that the BBC's commitment to classic adaptations was kick-started during his 10-month stay at the Corporation it would appear that he swapped his car-park pass for a bout of amnesia when he left us. It must have slipped his mind that a stream of BBC classics - *Clarissa*, *Middlemarch*, *Martin Chuzzlewit* and *Persuasion* - had already been transmitted or produced ahead of his arrival, and before the BBC wholeheartedly embraced *Pride and Prejudice*. ITV is now seeking to imitate this vein of success.

WILL WYATT
Chief Executive, BBC Broadcast London W12

Fight them for the beeches

Sir: A profound moral issue faces the Department of the Environment following their inspection of the Rusland Beeches in Cumbria (report, 7 October). The decision to support or refuse the application for the lifting of tree preservation orders on these old beeches by the Lake District National Park Authority will have far-reaching consequences for mature trees throughout the United Kingdom.

There is an increased trend to cut down large mature trees for safety reasons. We are losing beautiful old trees that provide a habitat to wildlife requiring rotting wood such as the uncommon noctule bats found in the Rusland Beeches.

Because the average person cannot rationalise statements about the safety of a tree, an "expert" is called upon to take on the responsibility of stating that a tree is safe, and it takes a lot of courage and understanding of mature trees to make this statement. It is far too easy to do avoid the problem by pronouncing a tree to be dangerous. A tree felled will never prove one wrong.

The sense of outrage felt by the local people who intuitively know the trees are safe from their experience of them in all weather conditions is immense.

Dr GEOFF DELLOW
Buckhurst Hill, Essex

Gay saints

Sir: With reference to your news item about the Bishop of Ripon ("Bishop sacked over gay blessing", 18 October), how is it that the Christian Church can canonise a gay couple in the fourth century yet in the 20th century cannot even bring itself to recognise a gay couple in its fold?

St Serge and St Bacchus were canonised in the fourth century, according to John Boswell's *The Marriage of Likeness*. He cites other canonised couples as well.

MARTIN MOTTRAM
Salisbury, Wiltshire

Not quite perfect

Sir: Egon Ronay (letter, 18 October) leaps to defence of the Waterside Inn from an outrage perpetrated by the AA.

I had the pleasure of dining at the Waterside in July and the majority of the meal was wonderful. In certain areas - the canapés, the petits fours and the bread - I believe that "this country's greatest chef" can do better than was achieved that night.

Nothing was bad and certainly I do not raise real complaint but perhaps the AA sense that the restaurant is not currently absolute perfection and have responded by a slight downgrading.

K R WHITEHEAD
Sandhurst, Berkshire

Adam only 5,999

Sir: David Mansfield (letter, 22 October) has forgotten that there is no year zero between 1BC and AD1. Thus, the 6,000th birthday of Adam will be next year; and the picture from the Sistine Chapel ceiling can wait until then. We can usefully spend the time thinking of a suitable way of marking the occasion, and also the 2,000th birthday of Christ later that year.

OWEN GWYNNE
Runcom, Cheshire

interview

Cyber face

None of us, any more, is exempt. All of us are snarled in the systems of computers, all pay our dues to cyberspace, snuffing around in our own patch of it. Every time you stick a bit of plastic in a machine, or pay a bill, or communicate with an organisation, you leave your tracks in it. But what is it exactly?

William Gibson, the science-fiction writer, is the poet of cyberspace. His achievement is not merely to have named it. ("Cyberspace" made its first appearance in his first novel, *Neuromancer*, published in 1984, whose sales are now in the millions.) It is to have made that darkness in which all of us now pad about like moles, visible. What Gerard Manley Hopkins did for the flight of the falcon, Turner for fog, Dali for the unconscious and William Burroughs for a brain deranged by junk, Gibson has done for the digital dimension. He has painted it for us so vividly and persuasively that those dreary keyboards and screens can never be the same again.

"The matrix is an abstract representation of the relationships between data systems," he starts off drily enough in his 1985 story *Burning Chrome*. "Legitimate programmers jack into their employers' sector of the matrix and find themselves surrounded by bright geometries representing the corporate data. Towers and fields of it ranged in the colourless non-space of the simulation matrix. Legitimate programmers never see the walls of ice they work behind, the walls of shadows that screen their operations from others."

It begins soberly, but once the adrenalin starts churning it's a tour of the mountains of the moon on acid. The talent of Bobby, *Burning Chrome's* anti-hero, is to break into data systems by destroying these walls of "ice" that protect them. The narrator goes along for the ride:

"Ice walls flick away like supersonic butterflies made of shade. Beyond them, the matrix's illusion of infinite space... This is the far side of the ice, the view of the matrix I've never seen before... The core data tower around us like vertical freight trains, colour-

coded for access. Bright primaries, impossibly bright in that transparent void, linked by countless horizontals in nursery blues and pinks..."

Sure, it's overwrought. But such passages, which in *Neuromancer* encrust a fast, cruel (400 deaths), impossibly hip narrative, gave brilliant literary form to the previously inchoate longings and urges of the first generation of PC nerds.

If you were casting for the part of King Nerd, Gibson would be up there on the shortlist along with Bill Gates, being tall and stooped and narrow-shouldered, bespectacled and wry. The funny thing is that he's far from nerdy in his preoccupations: he wrote *Neuromancer* on an ancient manual typewriter, and while he's graduated to a computer for word processing, he refuses to have an e-mail address, finching at the thought of all the mail he would have to wade through.

Born 48 years ago in Virginia, he moved to Canada aged 19 as a precaution against being drafted for the Vietnam War, and for 20 years has been settled in suburban Vancouver, where he lives now with his wife and two children. Professionally he was a slow starter, spinning out his years studying Eng Lit until all his cronies drifted off to law school and the like. "When Punk arrived from London, I spent a year just watching it," he says.

He began writing and selling science fiction to a magazine called *Omnif* in 1979-80 when he was in his late twenties. "They paid enough money that I couldn't stop," he says. Several of those stories—collected in a volume called *Burning Chrome*—are among the best things he's done. The first novel followed smoothly on.

Rarely in recent times has an author made such an explosive debut: *Neuromancer* won all three of America's science-fiction awards, and became an instant bestseller. "Cyberspace" entered the language, and a mantle of cool descended on a million anoraks. Gibson was rewarded with the nerds' eternal love. He has, for example, a drawer at home stuffed with audiocassettes by the 100 or so garage bands who have made recordings in homage to the book.

But given that he himself is

Do science fiction writers merely predict the future, or can they create it through their writing?

Peter Popham talks to William Gibson, inventor of cyberspace, about where we are headed next

not a Net addict, how I wanted to know, did these rhapsodic cyberspace passages come about?

"It's a tough question. You can find what one critic calls 'passages of heightened language' in a lot of science fiction from the Sixties on. In order to excuse them there had to be some technological or mythological rationale: OK, you've just gone into hyperdrive, OK, you've just swallowed the x3 tablets and your nervous systems are melting in rainbow colours... I remember needing an excuse for such passages. I had that need before I had the cyberspace idea, and I dreamed the cyberspace idea up to allow me to do that... My real contribution is that I have given my readers an objective correlative for the digital universe. I'm proud of having done that."

And although he'd never heard of the Internet when he was writing *Neuromancer*, he is also proud to be the prophet

and defender of an Internet that is free, as originally intended, of controls.

"The Internet could one day be seen as being terrifically significant: something akin to the building of cities. It seems to me to be that unusual. It's quite unlike anything that was ever done before in a number of ways. It's immune to legislation because it's post-national and post-geographical. Because of the reasons for its initial design and the nature of its architecture, because it's designed to shift packets of information in the wake of or even during a nuclear war, it's impossible to control the flow of information within it. That may be the grand irony of the Cold War era: what we remember the Cold War for is, not only did we not drop the bomb, but we created what may one day be seen as the really major part of the universe: this place where we increasingly do more and more of everything we call society."

Gibson has been called the George Orwell of the computer age, but the parallel is flawed. The world of his books is as desperate and eco-catastrophic as that of the film *Blade Runner* (it opened while Gibson was writing *Neuromancer*—"I fled the cinema after 15 minutes, deeply dismayed, because it looked exactly like the pictures on the inside of my forehead, actually it looked better"). But, as in *Blade Runner*, the squalor and desperation have their own kind of lurid glamour. And subverting the pessimism is a subtle Sci-

ences' triumphalism—for the Internet is the ultimate realisation of the libertarian dreams of the Whole Earth Catalog types of the late 'Sixties."

"I'm just a product of my time," he said three years ago. "Computers, in a sense, were invented by acid heads. Fractal geometry, as far as I can tell, was more or less discovered by old acid heads looking for the mathematical formulae that resembled an LSD hallucination."

In his new novel, *Idoru*, however, a truly dark new note enters his work. Because in this world, a generation or so into the future, the authorities have

finally succeeded in nailing the Internet down; the fears, so current now both in the United States and here, that the Internet's structure allows crime of all sorts to flourish, have resulted—the "how" is vague—in close surveillance of everything that uses the Net.

An article that he wrote two years ago for *Wired* magazine foreshadowed this dark imagining. The subject was Singapore, a place whose authoritarianism and consumerist banality filled him with despondency. But what worried him even more was that, as he put it, "now they propose to become something else as well: a coherent city of information, its architecture planned from the ground up. And they expect that whole highways of data will flow into and through this city. Yet they also seem to expect that this won't affect them... Myself I'm inclined to think that if they prove to be right, what will really be proven will be something very sad... They will have proven it possible to flourish through the active repression of free expression. They will have proven that information does not necessarily want to be free."

In the Japan in which *Idoru* is located, this dire threat has come to pass. Yet it has not finally triumphed, because a gaggle of disaffected, computer-obsessed youth (or "pathological techno-fetishists-with-social-deficit" as the

earclip translator renders the simple and actually current Japanese word *otaku*) have found a way to thwart it. Inspired by a huge, illegal city of squatters, the "City of Darkness", which defied the British authorities in Hong Kong until torn down in the early Nineties, they have created something analogous on the Net: a "multi-district" but one whose architecture bars entrance to authority, ramshackle, ad hoc, self-sufficient, but brilliantly defended.

He describes it thus: "And then the thing before her: building or biomass or cliff face looming there, in countless unplanned strata, nothing about it even or regular. Accreted patchwork of shallow random balconies, thousands of small windows throwing back blank silver rectangles of fog. Stretching either way to the periphery of vision, and on the high, uneven crest of that ragged facade, a black fur of twisted pipe, antennas sagging under vine growth of cable..."

Gibson's use of the City of Darkness is an interesting example of how he weaves pure inventions with real or recently existing phenomena. For Hak Nam (as it was known in Cantonese) really existed: a notionally Chinese-ruled speck in British-ruled Kowloon, which after World War II, as refugees poured in from the mainland into the colony, was transformed into a vast, mouldering, organic megastructure, home to 33,000 people, notorious for its crime, its disease

and its fires, but also self-provided with kindergartens, clinics, factories, restaurants, saloons, a temple, rooftop cages full of racing pigeons...

By an odd chance, it was the piece I wrote about Hak Nam in the *Independent Magazine* six years ago, later republished elsewhere, that helped focus Gibson's attention on the place. In *Idoru*, it plays an important role: it's "the great good place of the novel", as he puts it to me, quoting Mark Twain, the symbol of hope and the refuge of his protagonists.

Of course, being a Gibson novel, the hero and heroine have their peculiarities: he's a Sino-Irish rock singer, she's a virtual woman whose "only physical reality is a thing like a large metal thermostat". Their proposed marriage is as controversial as black/white unions a generation or two ago. But at the end of the book they prepare to tie the knot, and to set up home on undeveloped landfill ("one of the old 'Toxic Necklace' sites, but that's been cleaned up since the quake") in Tokyo Bay. And that home will be... a sort of replica of Hak Nam, City of Darkness, biggest slum in the world.

In Gibson's highly peculiar terms, that must count as a happy ending. "What could be more frightening," Gibson asked in his article about Singapore, "out here at the deep end of the 20th century than a genuinely optimistic science-fiction writer?" Yet Gibson himself comes close.

Don't let that budgie destroy your life...



Miles Kingston

Today I am devoting the whole of this space to the care and maintenance of small household pets. I know nothing about the care and maintenance of small household pets, so I have had to hire the services of an expert. Sadly, at short notice I was not able to hire an expert on household pets, but I am very glad to have secured the services of a top lawyer, Mr J Millington Smythe. All yours, Mr Smythe!

How often should a budgie's cage be cleaned? J Millington Smythe writes: You are not contractually obliged to clean your budgie's cage at all, of course, unless you signed a contract when you acquired your bird from the pet shop. I very much hope you did not do this, as people have sometimes been caught in long-term and crippling arrangements with pet shops.

I had a client once who signed an agreement with a pet shop which committed her not only to cleaning her bird's cage every day, but also to entering a time-share arrangement over a villa in Spain AND taking out a very expensive life insurance policy. On herself? J Millington Smythe writes: No, on the bird. Did you manage to caricature her from this crippling contract? J Millington Smythe writes: The outcome was very satisfactory. What does that mean? J Millington Smythe writes: It means that my client is

going to spend the rest of her life paying off my fees. So, how often should a budgie's cage be cleaned? J Millington Smythe writes: I find the best arrangement is to train the bird to clean its own cage. Alternatively, you can stand in front of the bird's cage and declare three times: "I pronounce this cage well and truly cleaned!" Is that legal? J Millington Smythe writes: In parts of the Islamic world, I believe it is, yes.

Whenever I clean my budgie's cage, she picks up a little sunflower seed or other delicacy after it is all over and hands it to me, as if to say thank you! Isn't that sweet? J Millington Smythe writes: No. It is a highly dangerous precedent. By accepting payment from your pet, you are in effect entering into an unspoken agreement, *de facto* rather than *de jure*, which commits you to repeating the service on a regular basis. You could therefore, and I do not exaggerate, be sued

for neglect if you do NOT keep up the regular cleaning of the cage, and the sunflower seed would be cited as an example of the payment changing hands. Or, in her case, claws. By accepting the sunflower seed you are tacitly admitting liability. But who would sue the owner? J Millington Smythe writes: The bird, of course. How can a bird sue an owner? J Millington Smythe writes: He need only get in touch with me and I can do the rest.

Has a bird ever successfully sued an owner? J Millington Smythe writes: Oh, yes. I need only draw your attention to the classic case of Pal Joey vs Mrs Templeton, in 1958, in which Mrs Templeton was taken to the cleaners by a law firm acting for her budgie. What was the outcome of the case? J Millington Smythe writes: The lawyer won, of course. And the next, please!

I recently bought a dog for the first time and am wondering what information I should put on the brass tag on his collar, such as name, address etc, as there isn't a lot of room. J Millington Smythe writes: DON'T, whatever you do, put the dog's name on. This will give any kidnapper a great advantage, as he will be able to call the dog by his name and get his trust. Don't NOT put your own phone number on it, as then the kidnapper will find it all too easy to ring you up and make his demands. Do not put your address, as burglars often read these when they burglar the house, and the watch dog is alerted too clearly absent. What shall I put on, then? J Millington Smythe writes: Ideally, nothing. If you MUST put something, write the name and phone number of the dog's solicitor. J Millington Smythe will be back soon to deal with your inquiries about being and winter sports. Keep those queries rolling in!

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Take the fight out of the House and on to our screens

We really shouldn't be shocked that the Queen's Speech debate turned into such an electioneering opportunity yesterday. It's true that the speech and the Royal procession which precedes it is the annual acme of Merrie England. Maybe all that party politics does slightly undermine the heritage value of the ritual. But it's hardly a surprise, given that it's the last one of the Parliament. And at least something happened.

It's not every day you see, as you did yesterday afternoon, the leaders of the two main parties haggling and dealing across the Commons floor about bills for the new session. And after all, normal precedent suggests that this is the last time, apart from the twice-weekly point-scoring game of Prime Minister's Questions, that the voters will have a chance to see Tony Blair and John Major face-to-face before they go to the polls.

But is it? Or could we, at long last, see the two leaders debating with each other on television during the election campaign in six months' time? Peter Mandelson, Labour's election campaign director, evidently thinks it is possible. Last week he slipped away unnoticed at the beginning of the short parliamentary recess and paid a brief visit to the United States. He had a series of meetings fixed up with administration figures in Washington to discuss the fashionable topic of reinventing government.

But he also had another, less official, mission. To watch in person the second of the two Clinton-Dole television debates in the Shiley Theatre in San Diego. He talked to Clinton's staff about the awesomely detailed preparations the President had made for them, such as the use of Senator George Mitchell as a surrogate. Bob Dole in rehearsal, and around a dozen spin doctors to fan out among the press after the 90-minute debate to explain just what success it had been for the incumbent. Not to mention Clinton's carefully prepared and slightly response to feed off seriously awkward questions and briefs about everything from Indonesian donations to the Democrats to Whitewater. "No insult ever created a job or improved a school."

All that preparation, as it happens, may have been part of what has made the two Clinton-Dole events somewhat less memorable than the television debates in some of the nine presidential punch-ups that have gone by since a sweating Richard Nixon slugged it out with Jack Kennedy in 1960. (Radio listeners judged Nixon the victor but those watching on television plumped for Kennedy.) Neither of the candidates dropped a big clanger, composites to recall Gerald Ford's wacky remark that Poland wasn't dominated by the Soviet Union, or Jimmy Carter saying that he had asked his daughter Amy what the big issue was in the election – a gaffe that immediately and justly spawned thousands of Republican



Donald Macintyre
Tony Blair wants it. The voters deserve it. And now even the Tories may see the wisdom of a live TV debate

"Ask Amy" lapel badges, or even George Bush looking at his watch during one of the three debates with Clinton in 1992. And they haven't, this year, moved the market. Although, after San Diego, most voters judged Clinton the winner, more than 95 per cent said it would make no difference to how they would vote. But the debates remain the seminal events of US presidential elections.

Whether it happens here, of course, is in the end entirely up to John Major. The decision would be quite a momentous one; no Prime Minister could ever refuse again if Major agreed this time. Paddy Ashdown would certainly have to be accommodated as a participant. Television presenters would kill for the chance of fronting it. But these are hardly obstacles. In Conservative Central Office, the official line is that it's a "distant runner" and that Major certainly isn't in favour of the "cheap exchange of sound bites" which the Tories claim Blair would favour. But there are several reasons why he might not, in the end, hold out against it.

First, Labour will press for it with much more genuine persistence than they ever did during Neil Kinnock's leadership – the call to debate with Margaret Thatcher in 1987 was especially *sotto voce*. And the harder and more stridently their opponents demand it, the more the Tories inevitably pay a price for refusing.

The second is that Major's highly successful question-and-answer session at the party conference in Bournemouth has convinced at least some of his strategists that he could perform very well indeed, particularly in the kind of "town meeting" setting, similar to the one in San Diego, with a randomly sampled audience of ordinary voters asking questions.

The third is that if Major starts the campaign well behind in the polls then he has very little to lose – and possibly, if Tony Blair should falter, a lot to gain. Yesterday wasn't Major's best day, but you can imagine circumstances in which Major might want a debate more than Blair, and Blair having made the call couldn't possibly refuse.

And the fourth is that surely it's high time it happened. It's extraordinary, when you think about it, that after 36 years of campaign television debates in the US, we still don't have them here. The electors deserve something over and above the carefully arranged early-morning press conferences, armies of spin doctors, stagey national tours and mind-bending party political broadcasts using all the skills of modern television advertising. A studio audience of voters would be nicer and perhaps wiser than the braying backbenchers of yesterday. Why shouldn't the television viewers be able to compare and contrast? And just for good measure why not throw in a deputies' debate with Michael Heseltine and John Prescott. Now, that would be fun.

Your children are my business

by Sara Maitland



The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children's commission into child abuse has, after two years of inquiry, produced its report. Its remit was wide-ranging and its recommendations no less so, but at its centre is a clear call for a radical change in cultural attitude – "a new perception of children not as possessions but as individuals with rights and developing responsibilities of their own".

The thinking behind this particular section of the report is straightforward: most children are not abused by mysterious strangers, escaped convicts or organised paedophile rings, but within their own home by members of their family and their parents' friends. This statistic is widely accepted and consistently ignored. It means, quite simply, that we cannot trust parents to protect their children – from sexual abuse or other kinds of cruelty and neglect.

Much abuse is preventable. In most cases of abuse that do come to light, it transpires that someone already knew, was uneasy, was "concerned" but did not see fit, or did not have the nerve, to do anything about it. We will take to the streets to prevent cruelty to veal calves, but not to our children.

The conclusion is clear to the commissioners: Lord Williams, who chaired the commission, said: "We will never be able to prevent abuse wholly. But much of it can be prevented. This depends on the effort of imagination and will on behalf of the whole country."

Or, more bluntly, people must stop minding their own business.

Even before the contents of the report can have been absorbed, people are fretting about "busy-bodies", worrying that such recommendations will become a "snooper's charter". The thinking appears to be that parents should be left alone to bring up their children as they see fit. For example, the Government's first response to the report has been to repudiate a number of key areas and reassure parents (the group from which most abusers are drawn) that they will not change the law over "reasonable chastisement" (spanking), whatever the experts say. They are signalling hands-off and mind-your-own-business, even while they run a campaign to encourage neighbours to report benefit fraud. This is a strange scale of values. Personally, I do not think the

Most abuse occurs within the home by family members or parents' friends. This statistic is widely accepted and consistently ignored

commission has gone far enough. The well-being of all children is my business; it is everybody's business. The change in cultural attitude that we ought to be seeking is not that we should stop minding our own business, but that we should start doing so.

It is my financial business. The children now in primary school will be the workers who will pay for my pension, my health care, my community services when I am old. If they are not my business now, why should I be theirs then? If I do not make them my business now, will they be fit and able to

tion to, or are rude to children (and a failure to listen to someone speaking to you is at the very least bad-mannered) then they will ignore, at best, or be rude to adults. If they are not treated as citizens, why should we expect them to behave like citizens? If their education is not resourced properly, is not treated with respect, why should they respect teachers or other authorities? If I regard their bodies and minds (usually their only property) as none of my business, are they likely to treat my body or property any differently?

It is my civic business. All citizens have a duty to prevent crime. Fear is not regarded by the courts – as we saw this week – as a sufficient reason for not giving evidence. (The two women who had used this argument had their sentences reduced; they were not acquitted.) Cruelty to, and abuse of, children is a crime. We have an obligation not just to report such a crime when we believe it to be occurring, but to take reasonable action to prevent it. I am the mother of two children: there are a whole range of actions against them which I would intervene personally over, or would report to the police and expect them to act on: abuse, bullying, intimidation, threats, for example. That seems a reasonable standard to start with – if it was "my" child would I do anything? Would I want someone else to? When the answer is "yes", I should be prepared to do the same for other children.

It is also, dare I say it, my moral business. Children are not the possessions of their parents. They are not to be equated with cars or televisions. They are not private property. People cannot be private property – in any other context that would be called slavery. Children are people, and they have the same rights as any other human being; they are just especially and specifically vulnerable. A community that will not vigilantly defend the rights of its most vulnerable members is a community whose freedoms are at risk. This is an issue of democracy.

Children are my business; they are everyone's business. In not acting on their behalf we are failing to protect our own interests, long and short-term. There are fascinating questions about how we lost touch with this obvious fact, but whatever the answers we have lost touch with it. If we are serious about stopping the abuse of children, we need to re-learn it fast.

Call me a drooling pervert, but I've become obsessed with Barbie dolls. I love the way they're supposed to embody, in nine inches of plastic, the supposed dreams and career plans of today's girls; and the way, in the interests of offering an eclectic portfolio of hobbies to the nation's seven-year-olds, the manufacturers keep coming up with more and more ridiculous things for her to do. With the help of my indefatigable assistant, Sophie (nine), I've identified: Mountain-Climbing Barbie, Skiing Barbie, Magic Songbird Barbie, Twirling Ballerina Barbie, Beach and Lifeguard Barbie, Barbie And Her Horse Nibbles, Teacher Barbie and Mermaid Barbie. Then there are the smutty variants for aspirant good-time girls – Gymnastic Barbie, and "Overnight Barbie With Overnight Bag" and, I dare say, one or two bags under her eyes as well.

This plenitude should impress the doll-buying world as pretty enlightened. Far from being a stereotypical ditz model-girl, Barbie seems to represent a career-advice department. But nothing can impress the stern mullahs of Iran's toy industry. The state-owned Children's Cultural Promotion Centre (a kind of fundamentalist Early Learning Centre) is setting out to protect its innocent youth from the pernicious influence of "Barbie culture", by designing dolls in appropriate dress, or "Islamic Barbie", or "Hajjah" Barbie, complete with chador, demure costume, black hair, devout expression and (don't ask me why) single eyebrow. Cute, isn't she? I expect Hajjah will soon be full of advanced versions: infidel Barbie (with detachable



Here is Islamic Barbie, complete with chador and devout expression

john walsh

ning modulations of cupidity and desire. Bloody marvelous. I think they should head for London's Almeida Theatre without delay.

Dropped into the launch party for the book version of my colleague Bridget Jones's celebrated *Diary*, that shockingly unbuttoned journal of socio-sexual intrigue among thirtysomething single girls that distracts Independent readers from giving their full attention to the EMU and the Referendum Party. The launch was held upstairs at L'Escargot, the fashionable eatery whose logo of a glamorous snail neatly crosses Bridget's slow-motion progress on the highway to love and riches. Given the delicious Ms Jones's obsessive monitoring of her intake of cigarettes, booze, chocolates. Instant scratch-cards and unsuitable men, several conversations proceeded along formulaic lines: "Can I get you another unit?" "Nah, thanks, I've had 18 (approx) already (v bad)". The air was thick with neurotic parentheses. The guests were awash with Bloody Marys (v gd), Harry Enfield, buoyed up by the experience of winning £10 on an Instant card earlier, bought five copies of the book. Nick Hornby lurked meaningfully under a poster of Colin Firth in his Mr Darcy high collar, as if daring passers-by not to spot a resemblance (Firth is playing Hornby in the film of the latter's *Fever Pitch*). Tim McInerney, Richard Curtis and Emma Freud, Ben Elton and a whole slew of television drolls tackled this way and that. Bridget's wayward friend Shazza turned out to be a doll-faced Irish TV executive with her hair yanked up in an

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Murdoch mortgages BSkyB stake

Mathew Horsman
and Derek Pain

Rupert Murdoch is planning to mortgage up to £1.25bn worth of his shares in BSkyB, the high-flying satellite broadcaster, to finance digital TV development plans elsewhere in his global media empire.

News America Holdings, a US-based subsidiary of Mr Murdoch's News Corporation, is seeking to raise as much as \$2bn through an issue of preference shares, convertible at a pre-determined price into

shares of BSkyB, Britain's most profitable broadcaster.

The issue would be convertible into as much as 11 per cent of BSkyB, or more than a quarter of Mr Murdoch's 40 per cent stake in the company.

In the first instance, Merrill Lynch, which is placing the issue, is seeking to raise about \$1bn, but "greenshoe" provisions mean the total financing could be double that.

The issue, which would carry a dividend of about 5 per cent, will be priced next week. The proceeds are thought to be ear-

marked for the development of Mr Murdoch's digital TV plans in the US and Asia.

Normally, such preference shares would be convertible into shares of the issuing company or its parent.

The stock will be convertible at a premium of about 20 per cent to the price of BSkyB shares at the time of issue, and will be redeemable after five years.

Mr Murdoch's News America Holdings will have the right to offer converting stockholders cash instead of shares,

equivalent to the then ruling BSkyB share price.

According to sources familiar with the financing, the move represents a bet by Mr Murdoch that he will be able to afford to retire the shares at their conversion date, possibly within five years, even if the shares soar well above the pre-set conversion price. That way, he would avoid seeing his 40 per cent stake in BSkyB diluted when the shares became convertible.

Shares in BSkyB dropped 42.5p yesterday to close at 636p, as rumours of the share issue be-

gan to circulate through the market.

Dealers said the sharp drop was also in reaction to fears that the new cable telephony and TV group, Cable & Wireless Communications, would pose a competitive threat to BSkyB. Some dealers were also concerned that the financing might mean Mr Murdoch was backing away from his commitment to BSkyB.

But it is understood that Mr Murdoch is convinced he can use the funds to finance rapid growth of his other global TV interests, earning a return that

is robust enough to more than cover the costs of redeeming the preference stock even if BSkyB shares soar far above the conversion price.

The two most likely targets of the fresh funds are Star-TV, Mr Murdoch's Asian pay-TV service, and ASkyB, the US-based company that is jointly developing a digital satellite service with US partners.

The special convertible shares, developed by Merrill Lynch, have been marketed to other big corporations in need of fresh funds.

According to informed sources, Merrill Lynch has also approached Granada, which is working to reduce the debt pile it amassed following its takeover of Forte, the hotels and restaurants group early this year.

Senior executives of Granada, which has an 11 per cent stake in BSkyB, met Merrill Lynch earlier this year to outline the attractions of raising funds via preference shares convertible into BSkyB stock. Granada is believed to be reviewing ways it can "collater-

alise" its BSkyB holding, which is worth more than £1.1bn.

Analysts said last night that the preference shares could be attractive to institutions which have been underweight in BSkyB shares. Because only 25 per cent of the company's stock trades freely, there have been acute shortages of available shares for index-linked funds and other City institutions.

Such shortages have been one reason for BSkyB's rapid rise on the stock market. Comment, page 25

BT plans radical internal shake-up

Chris Godsmark
Business Correspondent

The vogue for corporate restructuring sweeping across British industry has taken hold with a vengeance at BT, with news that the company is implementing a radical plan to split its internal structure into 40 or 50 separate business units.

Fresh from the dramatic programme of staff reductions, which has seen the workforce shrink from 240,000 to 125,000 in just seven years, the company is now introducing a radical programme to introduce a full-scale internal market.

Each division involved will act as a stand-alone business with its own profit and loss account and the ability to outsource some operations to other companies. BT said yesterday that

who joined the company at the beginning of the year from the ICL computer group. Within weeks Sir Peter had criticised the staff culture within BT's London headquarters which still has elements of civil service bureaucracy.

Jeff Richardson, the director of the internal-market project confirmed that similar and unpopular reforms carried out at the BBC had been studied before BT's reorganisation began earlier this year. He said several lessons had been learnt from the BBC approach.

"We're going forward in an evolutionary way... we don't want to take people's eyes off the ball while the changes are going ahead," Mr Richardson said.

He insisted the reforms were not the first step towards having activities off. "We are already required by our licence to buy and sell internally," he explained. The reorganisation is being discussed with BT's main trade union, the Union of Communications Workers, which is determined to ensure it prevents each business unit negotiating wages and conditions separately. Tony Young, the CWU's joint general secretary, said he believed an agreement with management had been secured, though the detailed still needed to be thrashed out.

"The jury is still out on these changes. What it will mean over the next five years we've yet to learn. The real challenge is to continue with collective bargaining," he said.

Separately it has also emerged that BT is to reorganise its complex structure of job grades and responsibilities, heralding a move to multi-skilling which has also been a feature of the changes at the BBC.

The existing grading structure, a throwback to pre-privatisation days when BT's job descriptions were written along civil service lines, separates engineers, clerical staff and the dwindling number of operators.

The changes have been strongly backed by Sir Peter Bonfield, BT's chief executive

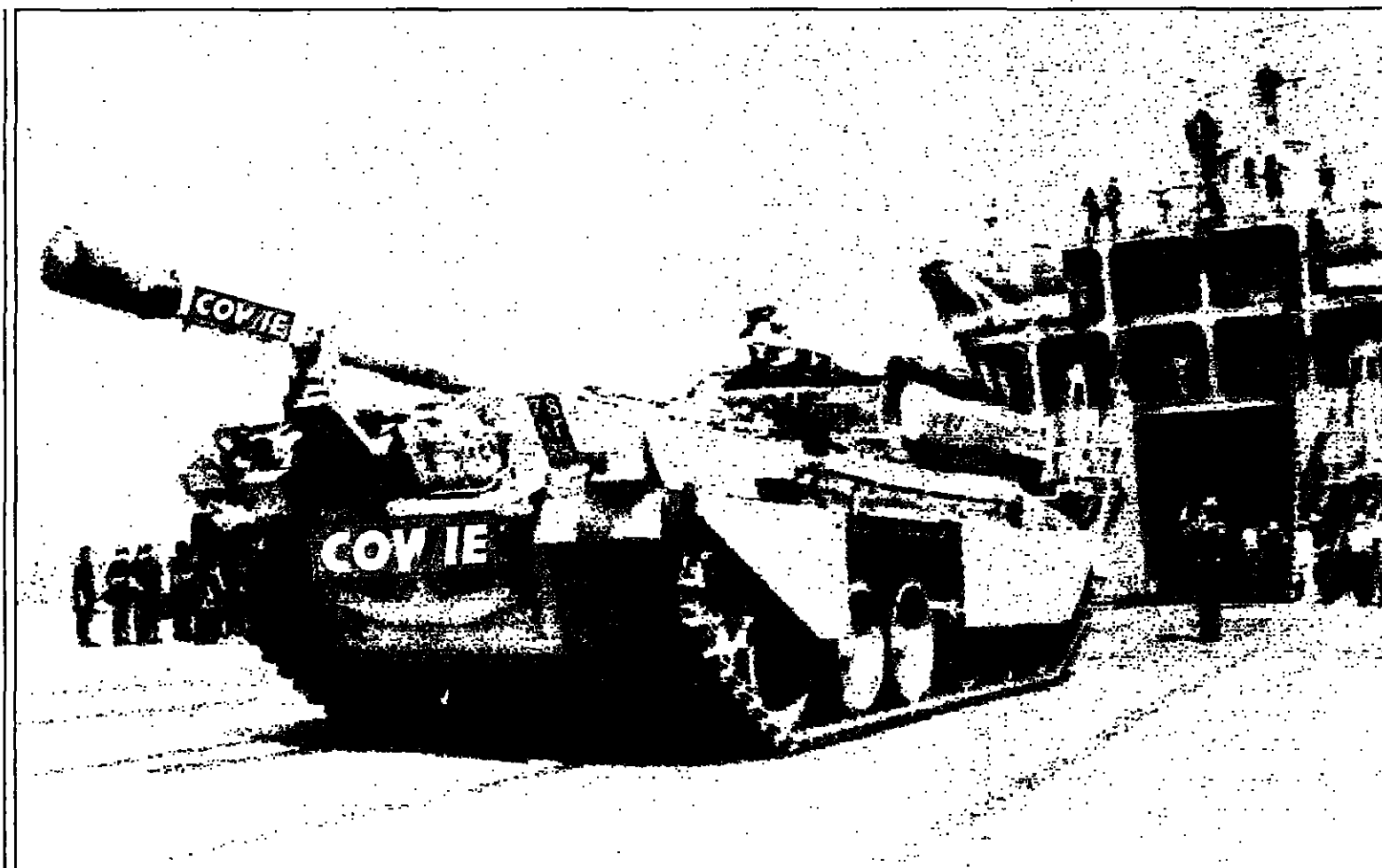


Sir Peter Bonfield: Criticised staff culture at London HQ

the aim was emphatically not to out jobs beyond the existing reductions in staffing levels and insisted there were no specific targets for cost savings.

It is the biggest internal upheaval since "Project Sovereign" in 1990, which swept away BT's traditional structure based on geographic lines and replaced it with divisions such as personal communications or business services.

The changes have been strongly backed by Sir Peter Bonfield, BT's chief executive



Into battle: Cowie is in talks with the Ministry of Defence that could see it owning the Challenger tanks used by front-line troops

British troops could roll into battle in tanks owned by the parent of the Grey Green bus group if talks between Cowie, the Newcastle-based motor group, and the Ministry of Defence bear fruit, writes Tim Stevenson. The company admitted yesterday that privatised front-line vehicles was a "controversial area" but said it was keen to tie-up a deal which could see it owning Challenger tanks and leasing them to the Army.

Robert Blower, a spokesman for Cowie, which up till now has restricted its leasing activities to company car fleets, said: "The Ministry is very open minded un-

Cowie in talks with MoD over tank leasing

der the Private Finance Initiative and is looking at the possibility of the private sector coming in and buying front-line vehicles. We have demonstrated there are significant savings that can be made."

A Ministry of Defence spokesman confirmed there were no "no-go areas" under the Private Finance Initiative and

said "any idea will be pursued if it is judged to be the best way forward."

Mr Blower signalled Cowie's ambitions as the company announced a multi-million pound deal with the MoD to lease 1,400 pieces of material handling equipment at 29 Army, Navy and Air Force locations in the UK. The contract covers a

wide range of equipment from fork-lift trucks to large conveyor belt systems costing up to £250,000 each. "People were surprised we could do a deal with the materials-handling equipment," Mr Blower said. "But we're a financial company. We can manage any piece of equipment and save the taxpayer money."

He admitted that talks were only preliminary and said it might take several years to agree the terms of any deal, which might involve Cowie obtaining an international arms dealing licence so it could dispose of equipment at the end of the agreed term.

SFA discipline plans face City backlash

Jill Treanor
Banking Correspondent

Opposition is mounting in the City to radical proposals by the Securities and Futures Authority (SFA) which would allow it to discipline senior executives if their firms go bust.

Replies to the regulator's consultation document show that some in the City believe the proposals are too simplistic in looking for one person to pin the blame on for the failure of a firm.

Most controversial of all is the move by the SFA to shift the burden of proof in disciplinary cases, so senior executives will have to prove they acted correctly rather than the SFA having to prove they failed in their duties.

The proposals were born out of frustration and public outcry at the SFA's inability to discipline the two men who ran Barings when it collapsed last year - Peter Barings, the chairman, and his deputy, Andrew Tuckey.

The SFA is proposing that senior executives take responsi-

bility for "serious financial damage" to a firm or its reputation.

That is too wide a definition for many. "Our members' difficulty is with the combination of reversing the burden of proof and the fact they go further than the case where the future of the financial firm is threatened by serious management failure," said Peter Beales, director at the London Investment Bankers Association.

Peter Vipond, assistant director at the British Bankers Association, would like to see a

more sophisticated approach:

"It's not just down to naming an individual. We need a more sophisticated framework for the management of risk within firms. The SFA's proposals may not help that."

At a recent seminar run by Coopers & Lybrand, the accountancy firm, to discuss the changes, 65 firms turned up and only two or three believed they required no changes.

Nick Durlacher, chairman of the SFA, was expecting the proposals to cause controversy

and draw a hostile reaction in the consultation phase, which ended this week.

"The consultation was not meant to be an empty gesture," said Mr Durlacher.

"But there's an expectation, which derives from Barings and which has been heightened by the more recent failures, that it takes two to make a muddle. One is the rogue and the other is the failure of management, and people want to be seeing management prodded into doing better."

John Bridgeman, director general of the OFT, said: "To treat competition law and cartels as something that is only the province of an independent body and the courts is a little dangerous. Parliament and ministers must be allowed to exercise authority and control. It is unrealistic to think competition issues can be kept free from political considerations because other interests have to be taken into account such as employment, cultural and defence considerations."

Karel van Miert, the EU Competition Commissioner, has also launched a withering attack on the German proposal. A background briefing document warns that the move to an independent cartel authority would uncouple competition matters from the rest of EU policy and weaken the promotion of the single market as a result.

He also warned that it would in effect mean the creation of two competition authorities since DG4 would still be responsible for state monopolies and state aid.

Banks seek pay curbs to stop traders from taking risks

Jill Treanor
Banking Correspondent

Leading bankers are preparing the groundwork for a common standard for pay awards in the City, as a way of preventing traders from taking too many risks as they chase substantial annual bonuses.

The bankers plan to hold a formal meeting around Christmas, a move prompted by

mounting concern in the City about the way - and the amounts - traders are paid.

The main fear is that these annual bonuses, which can double or even triple already substantial salaries, could encourage traders to take on too much risk and threaten the stability of their firms as in the high-profile collapse of Barings last year.

"It could be argued that some

traders are paid to take on more risk because it generates a lot of revenues," said Peter Vipond, assistant director of the British Bankers Association, which is organising the symposium.

The bankers' aim is to foster debate on the sensitive issue and one of the goals could be to encourage reward systems based on the risks taken by traders, often the youngest and highest-

paid members of a banking team, as well as the revenues they generate.

"A trader making half-a-million dollars taking no risk is doing more good than a trader who made million but bet the bank," Mr Vipond said.

Regulators pay close attention to the basis on which City traders are rewarded, but have no plans to introduce draconian rules on remuneration. And

any such moves would be strongly resisted by the industry on the grounds of commercial interference by the banking and securities regulators - the Bank of England and the Securities and Futures Authority.

Pay deals are highly competitive in the City and are often used by firms to poach staff from competitors. This caused controversy earlier this year when ING Barings hit out

against rival Deutsche Morgan Grenfell after it poached a trading team, saying such action pushed up pay deals unduly.

Generally, banks go to great lengths to monitor risks taken by their traders and take a tougher stance than is required by regulators.

The eventual conclusion of the discussions among banks could lead to a reappraisal of pay deals and a consensus over

bonuses being averaged out over a period of years or paid a year behind, for instance.

The Bank of England takes account of banks' pay schemes to watch for incentive schemes which encourage too much risk

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STOCK MARKETS					
Index	Close	Day's change	Change (%)	1996 High	1996 Low
FTSE 100	4057.20	-15.90	-0.4	4073.10	3632.30
FTSE 250	4452.70	+3.30	+0.1	4566.60	4015.30
FTSE 350	2016.20	-5.90	-0.3	2022.10	1816.60
FTSE SmallCap	2191.09	-2.23	-0.1	2244.36	1954.06
FTSE All-Share	1989.00	-5.54	-0.3	1994.54	1791.95
New York	6056.59	-34.28	-0.6	6094.23	5032.94
Tokyo	21123.68	-179.27	-0.8	22666.80	19734.70
Hong Kong	12444.66	-65.39	-0.5	12510.05	10204.87
Frankfurt	2716.98	-10.05	-0.4	2734.82	2253.38

INTEREST RATES					
Index	1 Month	3 Month	6 Month	1 Year	Long Bond
UK	5.84	6.38	7.55	8.04	7.88
US	5.19	5.5	6.59	8.00	6.86
Japan	0.44	0.53	2.69	2.87	-
Germany	3.03	3.18	6.01	6.46	6.84

CURRENCIES					
Index	Yesterday	Change	Year Ago	Index	Yesterday
\$ (London)	1.5975	+0.0001	1.5790	£ (London)	0.6280
¥ (London)	1.5950	+0.0001	1.5815	¥ (London)	0.6270
DM (London)	2.4521	+0.0001	2.1936	DM (London)	1.5350
₹ (London)	180.342	+0.001	158.427	₹ (London)	112.890
₪ (London)	88.3	+0.3	83.8	₪ (London)	97.6

OTHER INDICATORS					
Index	Yesterday	Day's change	Year Ago	Index	Yesterday
Oil Brent \$	24.18	-0.18	18.07	RPI	153.8+2.12pct
Gold \$	383.60	0.00	383.00	SNP	108.1+2.27pct
Gold £	240.13	+0.16	242.48	Base Rates	-5.75pc 6.75

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